

## LOVE HURTS: EXPLORATIONS OF LOVE, VALIDATION, AND CONFLICT

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*This paper considers how love may be conceptualised from a personal construct theory perspective, particularly in relation to experiences of validation and invalidation. This model is applied to writings about love, and the findings of a repertory grid and interview exploration of love, indicating differences in students' construing of romantically and platonically loved figures and relationships between grid scores and a measure of love styles, are presented. Illustrations are provided from the clinical setting indicating how clients' relationship problems may be explained in terms of their constructions concerning love.*

Keywords: love, conflict, validation, invalidation

*I hate and love. You may ask why I do so.  
I do not know, but I feel it and am in torment!*

(Catullus)

*Fair is my love, and cruel as she's fair,  
Her brow shades frowns, although her eyes are sunny.*

(Samuel Daniel)

*For even as love crowns you so shall he  
crucify you. Even as he is for your growth  
so is he for your pruning.  
Even as he ascends to your height and caresses  
your tenderest branches that quiver  
in the sun,  
So shall he descend to your roots and  
shake them in their clinging to the earth.*

(Kahlil Gibran)

*Love's pleasure lasts but a moment; love's  
sorrow lasts all through life.*

(Celestine)

*Friendship is a disinterested commerce  
between equals; love, an abject intercourse  
between tyrants and slaves.*

(Oliver Goldsmith)

*There is no love without hate!*

(Wilhelm Stekel)

*The course of true love never did run  
smooth.*

(William Shakespeare)

As the above quotes, and the title of this paper, indicate, a favourite topic of literature and popular songs from time immemorial is that love is not an easy ride. We shall consider how this conflictual nature of the experience of love may be viewed in terms of personal construct theory, and report the findings of two research studies conducted from this perspective. Love has not previously received much attention in the personal construct literature, as is also the case in the psychology literature generally (Tallis, 2005). Butt and Burr (2004) suggest that this may be because not only do psychologists shy away from areas that cannot be easily measured but also because love is something of a taboo subject.

Although Kelly (1955) did not include love in his original list of common emotional terms that he defined as constructs relating to transition, he did acknowledge in his later work that "Love" ... may hold an ever so important position in one's construct system – as I, for one, believe it should' (Kelly, 1977, p. 3). He also raised, and answered, three questions about love, namely:

*...is love actually rational? The answer to this question must, I believe, remain unknown in our generation. Yet our psychol-*

*ogy must enable us to cope with such unknowns. If we are careful to distinguish between love as an experience, on the one hand, and our rational construction of it, on the other, the question need not arise. Whatever it will turn out to be in the end, we should not be inhibited in examining it through the spectacles of rationality. As long as we remember what spectacles we are wearing, love, itself, need not be distorted by such inspection.*

*...Can love be completely understood if it is regarded in rational terms only? Probably not; we have not yet developed a completely rational understanding of much of anything, even things that seem much less complex than love...*

*...Is not the understanding of love implicit in the experience of love? If you can fall in love, does that not mean that you understand it? The experience does provide a kind of understanding but being in love with someone does not always carry with it a certain understanding of the love that another feels. And that is the root of many a tragedy (Kelly, 1977, pp. 3-4).*

Although in this passage Kelly provided an argument for the psychological examination of love, he did not attempt such an examination himself. Let us now accept Kelly's invitation and consider how the experience of love may be viewed in terms of personal construct processes.

## **VALIDATION AND INVALIDATION**

McCoy (1977, 1981) initially took up the challenge of providing a personal construct understanding of love when she extended Kelly's list of emotional terms defined from a personal construct perspective. Her definition of love was that it is 'a state of awareness of the validation of one's core structure' (McCoy, 1977, p. 109). It follows that 'The loved one is everything needed to be one's whole and true self' (p.109). McCoy was thus able to explain the behaviour of clients who persisted in apparently unsatisfying rela-

tionships in an attempt to defend their core structure.

The importance of mutual validation in relationships of friendship and love has been indicated by a number of research studies. Amongst their findings are that:

1. people seek out others with similar constructs (Duck, 1973);
2. advanced friendships are associated with greater commonality in less superficial areas of construing (Duck, 1973; Neimeyer & Neimeyer, 1981);
3. friends and partners are more satisfied with each other when they use constructs more similarly (Neimeyer & Hudson, 1985; Neimeyer & Neimeyer, 1981, 1985);
4. low similarity in construct use characterises deteriorating relationships (Duck & Allison, 1978; Neimeyer & Neimeyer, 1982);
5. similarity in intimate partners' construing involves not only the content but also the structure of their construct systems (Adams-Webber, 2001; Neimeyer & Neimeyer, 1983).

In the view of Neimeyer and Neimeyer (1985), close relationships may be regarded as 'forms of intimate collegueship in which two or more personal scientists collaborate in supporting and extending one another's critical life investments' (p. 197). As these workers have indicated, however, validation in a relationship may not only be achieved by commonality in partners' construing but also, in what they term 'negative relationships', by each individual contrasting their ideal self with their view of their partner. A personal construct perspective such as this can indicate why a seemingly unsatisfying relationship can be very resistant to change.

As Bannister and Fransella (1986) have pointed out, the role relationship of love provides not only the possibility of validation and aggressive elaboration of core role structures (Bannister, 1977) but also of invalidation of such structures. They consider that it is therefore the relationship in which a person is likely to take their 'greatest personal risk'. In Epting's (1977) view it is both the validation and the invalidation that are provided in a loving relationship that enable us to experiment and to elaborate our

self-construing. Therefore, invalidation in such a relationship need not necessarily be destructive. Indeed, a relationship which solely offered validation might be experienced as exceedingly boring. As Hatfield (1988) has indicated, this is the 'maximally rewarding relationship' described by some behaviourists, in which couples are 'locked in total agreement, smiling and nodding at one another, avoiding all stress' (p. 207). That a relationship of this type may be associated with psychological disorder rather than optimal functioning has been indicated by research on people diagnosed as agoraphobic (Winter & Gournay, 1987). This demonstrated a very high commonality in their and their partners' construing, and that the greater this commonality the less likely was the agoraphobic to go out of the house.

A similar argument may be applied to therapeutic relationships, which optimally, if they are to lead to any change, must involve not merely validation but also experiences of invalidation (Walker & Winter, 2005).

### **Terror**

The contrasting experiences of core role validation and invalidation have been most clearly described by Leitner (1985). While the former experience may be one of love, the latter is likely to be characterised by the conglomeration of negative emotions that Leitner describes as terror. For some individuals, this may lead them to view role relationships as too dangerous to contemplate, but they then deny themselves the opportunity of experiencing love.

One of the major components of terror is threat, the awareness of imminent comprehensive change in core structures. As Hall, Hendrick, and Hendrick (1991) have indicated, the dissolution of a love relationship in which one's identity is immersed is likely to be threatening, and individuals may remain in unsatisfying relationships rather than face this threat (Neimeyer & Hall, 1987). They assessed threat using a repertory grid by examining differences in the ratings on constructs of the self in and out of the current relationship. High scores on this measure in men were associated with low relationship satisfaction and valuing of love, and less

likelihood of engaging in rational, pragmatic love relationships.

### **Hostility**

One of the strategies that may be used by the person who is faced with core role invalidation in a love relationship is hostility, the extorting of evidence for invalidated constructions. For example, Bannister and Fransella (1986) described how the invalidated person may terminate the relationship in such a way that "the authenticity of the other person as a source of evidence" is denied (p. 25). These workers also indicated that a love affair can be developed in a hostile way by each partner bullying or bribing the other to validate their core construing. Kelly (1977) himself had previously suggested that in some instances what one person regards as love might better be construed as dependency or hostility. He illustrated "loving" hostility by describing a parent who construes and treats her child as being like a doll (Kelly, 1955).

### **Constriction**

A further strategy of construing that is often apparent in situations of passionate love is constriction, in that the world of the person who is in love appears to be limited to the love object, who becomes 'the source of all meaning in the lover's life' (Brehm, 1988, p. 257). As Flaubert (1959) described this state in 'Madame Bovary':

[The] *world, for him, was all contained within the silky rondure of her skirts* (p. 235).

However, Peele (1988) regards this type of absorption in another person as more akin to addiction than to the expansive experience which is genuine love, more consistent with Kelly's notion of dilation.

### **Preemptive construing**

The apparently limited construing of some people who are in love may also be manifested in a

tendency to use preemptive or constellatory constructions. As Kelly (1955) noted, while construction limits the number of elements in the person's perceptual field, pre-emption limits the number of constructs that are applied. McCoy (1977, p. 109) proposed that in many cases of people who persist in apparently unsatisfying relationships, love is "an element construed constellatorily as the ultimate good as well as the name of a pre-emptive construct". Preemptive construing may be manifested in idealisation of the lover, but again Peele (1988) considers this to be closer to addiction than to the truly helping relationship that he regards as love.

### **Dependency**

As Walker et al. (1988) have indicated, preemptive construing also characterises relationships of undispersed dependency, in which the individual places all his or her dependency eggs in the basket of one other person. This other person may be a love object, but it is to such a relationship that Kelly (1977) was probably referring when he stated that what may be described by someone as love might instead be viewed as dependency. As Hatfield (1988) has described, the individual who enters into this type of relationship, and who is not capable of independence, is likely to lack the capacity truly to be intimate since he or she cannot take any risks for fear of losing their partner. The love concerned is what Maslow (1970) termed 'deficiency love', contrasting it with the 'being love' of the more self-actualised person.

While love has been viewed by some researchers in terms of attachment (Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988), at least one personal construct psychologist, Sean Brophy (2004), is very clear that "Love is not about attachment" in that "it is not about having, in any real sense, whether having persons or things" (p. 13).

### **Sociality**

Kelly regarded the essence of intimate relationships as sociality, the construing of the other person's construction processes. This view is supported by research findings that people are more

satisfied with relationships in which they feel that their views of themselves and of desired personal changes, as well as their use of superordinate constructs, are accurately understood (Neimeyer & Hudson, 1985; Williams & Neimeyer, 1984). As Branden (1988) has described, one of the needs served by romantic love is the experience of psychological visibility, effectively having a 'psychological mirror' (p. 224).

### **Incomplete Experience Cycles**

Central to optimal functioning, according to Kelly (1970), is the completion of Experience Cycles. In these, the person anticipates an event, invests him- or herself in the anticipation, actively encounters the event, assesses whether the anticipations have been confirmed, and revises his or her construing accordingly. From this perspective, the experience of love may sometimes appear far from optimal. Stendhal (1926) described a stage model of passionate love in which a stage of anticipation follows an initial admiration of the beloved and is followed by hope and romantic attraction. However, there is then a process of crystallisation, essentially involving idealistic construing of the beloved, followed by doubt concerning whether one's love will be reciprocated and a second crystallisation where there is obsessive concern with fear of rejection. This would seem to indicate that the original anticipations of the beloved are never fully tested by the completion of an Experience Cycle. As Brehm (1988, p. 238) describes it, "The imaginative construction of the beloved takes on a life of its own, free from the constraints of the individual who is the beloved." In her view, "the core of passionate love lies in the capacity to construct in one's imagination an elaborated vision of a future state of perfect happiness" (p. 253). Indeed, the essence of passionate love may be the maintenance of uncertainty, and associated Kellyan anxiety, by avoidance of testing out of idealistic constructions of the beloved and of a future life with him or her. In the words of Flaubert (1959, p. 310), "We must beware of touching the idol for fear the gilt may come off in our hands". Similarly, Lazarus (1985) considered that "Romantic love thrives on barriers, frustrations, separations and delays.

Remove these obstacles, replace them with the everyday-ness of married life, and ecstatic passion fades". This may be likened to the 'if only' fantasy described by Fransella (1970) in which an idealistic construction of how one's life might be, for example without a particular symptom, is maintained by never testing it out. It may explain the endurance of passionate love, as in a man described by Stendhal (1926, pp. 53-4) whose passionate love of his wife survived for twenty five years because "she was unpredictable" and he "lived in constant fear of divorce".

Given Kelly's (1955) view of a disorder as "any personal construction which is used repeatedly in spite of consistent invalidation", and Walker's (2002) elaboration of this notion as involving 'non-validation', the failure to test out construing, it is perhaps not surprising that individuals may sometimes be regarded as love sick (Tallis, 2005; Tennov, 1979).

### Slot Rattling

In the view of Tallis (2005), the psychiatric 'sickness' that is most similar to love is bipolar disorder, with its alternation of periods of mania and depression. He makes the point that both in poetry and ancient medicine a language of dichotomy has tended to be used to describe love, including such oppositions as heaven and hell, hot and cold, and bliss and misery. From a personal construct perspective, the lover may be considered to engage in constant slot rattling, Kelly's (1969) term for the reassignment of an element, in this case the beloved, from one pole of a construct to the other.

### Varieties of love

Perhaps all that may be concluded from this personal construct consideration of love is that love comes in many forms and, of course, is subject to numerous alternative constructions, by lovers, poets, novelists, and academics alike. Implicit in many of the writings on love is the view that, as Lee (1988, p. 66) puts it, "the kind of love the researcher likes best is the only 'true' love". To quote further from this author, "How ironic, that in the glorious activity of loving, so many still

refuse to celebrate the wondrous human capacity for variety". Butt and Burr (2004) make a similar point in relation to the various available socially shared categories of love, and the anxiety experienced by the individual whose form of loving does not neatly fit into one of these categories. Some of these alternative forms of loving were discussed in the special issue of the *Journal of Constructivist Psychology* edited by Butt (2005) on 'The construction of sexualities'. For example, Barker (2005) explored how polyamorous individuals, who believe that it is possible to love and maintain sexual relationships with many people, construct their identities in a monogamous world.

Various taxonomies of love have been proposed by different authors (Weis, 2006), and one that has received some attention in the personal construct literature is Lee's (1973) differentiation between six love styles. These are Eros, which begins with powerful physical attraction; Ludus, game-playing, pluralistic love; Storge, a slowly developing loving affection; Mania, obsessive, possessive love; Pragma, rational love; and Agape, altruistic love. A Love Attitudes Scale was developed by Hendrick and Hendrick (1986) to measure these love styles, which, together with several relationship variables, were found by Hall, Hendrick, and Hendrick (1991) to be related to aspects of construing, as measured by a repertory grid.

A simpler distinction between different types of love is that between passionate and companionate love (Hatfield & Walster, 1978). Passionate love, on which we have largely focused above, is defined by Tallis (2005, pp. 47-8) as:

*a state of intense longing for the beloved. When reciprocated, passionate love is associated with joy, euphoria and ecstasy. However, these feelings are almost invariably shadowed by darker emotions such as anxiety, jealousy and sadness. Therefore, it is difficult to experience passionate love in the absence of at least some psychological pain...Passionate love is all-consuming, tending to dominate an individual's life to the exclusion of everything else; however, its intensity is short-lived.*

Passionate love is similar to Lee's (1973) manic love, in many cases of which 'the lover doesn't even *like* the beloved and would not choose him or her as a lasting friend.'

By contrast, Tallis (2005, p. 48) considers that:

*Companionate love may be less intense than passionate love, but it is more stable. It is generally associated with commitment and feelings of profound closeness. This level of intimacy can only be achieved in a relationship that evolves over an extended period of time. The companionate couple enjoy a symbiotic partnership, sustained by common goals and shared experiences. Although companionate love may never recover the heady heights of passionate love, neither does it plumb its depths.*

## **PERSONAL CONSTRUCT INVESTIGATIONS OF PASSIONATE AND COMPANIONATE LOVE**

### **Hypotheses**

The distinction between passionate and companionate love allows some synthesis of the personal construct conceptualisations of love, and leads to questions for research. Thus, the former type of love would appear to be characterised by a high risk of core role invalidation, or 'terror', coupled with strategies to avoid such invalidation, such as hostility, constriction, failure to complete Experience Cycles, and slot rattling in construing of the beloved. By contrast, the experience of companionate love would seem to be more one of mutual validation. This has led to the following hypotheses, which we have investigated in two research studies:

1. there is a higher degree of conflict in the way in which a passionate, as opposed to a companionate, love object is construed;
2. there is greater conflict in construing of the romantic partner in people who favour a more passionate love style, as reflected in Lee's Eros and Mania categories.

### **Study 1**

#### **Participants**

The participants were 20 female and 4 male undergraduate psychology students, with a mean age of 22.6 years (s.d. 3.5 years).

#### **Measures**

- Personal information sheet: this included questions concerning the stability of the participant's current romantic relationship and his/her past relationships.
- Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988): this measures relationship satisfaction, higher scores indicating greater satisfaction.
- Loving and Liking Scales (Rubin, 1973): these measure attitudes towards the partner, higher scores indicating greater loving or liking.
- Love Attitudes Scale (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986): this measures Lee's (1973) love styles, lower scores indicating greater endorsement of the love style concerned.
- Repertory grid: the grid elements were the participant's romantic partner; an ex-partner; mother; father; self; ideal self; the closest person to the participant with whom s/he had had no sexual involvement; and three significant others. 10 constructs were elicited by triadic comparison of these elements, and the constructs 'affectionate – unaffectionate' and 'honest – dishonest' were supplied. Elements were rated on constructs on a 7-point scale. Conflict was assessed by a repertory grid measure devised by Bell (2004), which defines conflict as occurring when:

1. an element is at the same time similar or close to two construct poles which are themselves different or distant; or
2. an element is similar or close to one construct pole and at the same time is different or distant from another construct pole, where the two construct poles are similar or close.

Conflict scores for elements were derived from the GRIDSTAT package (Bell, 1998), and the following scores were entered into the analysis:

- the mean conflict score for the current and ex-partner;
- the conflict score for the closest significant other;
- the mean conflict score for family members;
- the mean conflict score for the non-romantic partner and non-family significant others.

**Results**

Table 1. Mean conflict scores for grid elements in Study 1

Statistic	romantic partners	closest friend	family	non-family
Mean	11.2	9.6	10.5	9.2
Std.Dev.	1.9	3.2	2.1	.7
partners>friend (t = 2.18; 1-tailed p<0.05)				
partners>non-family (t = 3.37; 1-tailed p<0.01)				
N = 24				
family>non-family (t = 2.16; 1-tailed p<0.05)				

As indicated in Table 1, the mean conflict score for the current and ex-romantic partners (regarded as representing passionate love objects) was, as hypothesised, significantly higher than that for the closest significant other (regarded as representing a companionate love object). It was also significantly higher than the average conflict score for non-family significant others. The mean conflict score for the romantic partners was not significantly higher than that for family members, which in turn was significantly higher than that for non-family members.

The only significant correlation between the conflict score for the current romantic partner and the questionnaire measures was on the Love Attitudes Scale, and indicated that participants who endorsed an Eros, or passionate, love style tended to have more conflictual construing of their partner ( $r = -0.50$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ; 1-tailed).

**Study 2**

**Participants**

These were 24 female and 13 male undergraduate psychology students, with a mean age of 20.95 years (s.d. 4.62 years).

**Measures**

The participants completed the same measures as were used in Study 1, with the exception that in the grid the supplied construct ‘honest – dishonest’ was replaced by ‘sexually attractive – unattractive’. GRIDSTAT was used to partition the conflict, as defined by Bell (2004), attributable to each construct in the grids, and thus to identify the conflict associated with the ‘sexually attractive – unattractive’ construct.

In addition, participants completed an interview in which, drawing upon a method used by Viney and Westbrook (1981), they were asked to talk about the good and the bad things in their relationships with their current partner, each of their parents, and the closest other person with whom they had a platonic relationship. Responses to these questions were content analysed using a set of scales developed by Viney (1983). Participants were also asked to define love, to describe their ideal relationship, and to talk about the differences between the love that they felt for the various significant people in their lives.

**Results**

As in Study 1, the mean conflict score for partners was significantly higher than that for non-parent significant others (see Table 2). However, it was not significantly higher than the conflict score for the closest significant other nor than the conflict score for parents, which was higher than the conflict scores for significant others.

Table 2. Mean conflict scores for grid elements in Study 2

Statistic	romantic partners	closest friend	parents	significant others
Mean	10.77	9.84	11.61	9.37
Std.Dev.	2.42	3.67	2.32	1.42
partners>sig. others (t = 2.76; 1-tailed p<0.05)				
parents>friend (t = 2.32; p<0.05) N = 37				
parents>sig. others (t = 4.42; p<0.01)				

Although this study failed to replicate the relationship found in Study 1 between Eros love style and conflict, various other significant correlations were apparent between love styles and conflict scores (see Table 3). The obsessive love style that Lee (1973) termed Mania was, as predicted, correlated with a high mean level of conflict in construing of the current and ex-partners in females. The game-playing love style termed Ludus was associated with a low level of conflict in construing of the ex-partner in the group as a whole and in females, and low mean conflict in the construing of the current and ex-partner in females.

Table 3: Significant Pearson correlations between repertory grid conflict scores and love styles in Study 2

Conflict Scores	Love Styles			
	Mania	Ludus	Storge	Pragma
Partner Mean	F -0.36*	F 0.47(*)	F -0.49(*)	M 0.58(*)
Ex-Partner		T 0.39(*) F 0.55(*)	F -0.43(**) M -0.56(*)	
Closest Person				M -0.57(*)

F = females; M = males; T = total sample  
 () = 2-tailed tests; \* = p<0.05; \*\* = p<0.01

Correlations were also demonstrated between Storge, a friendship-based love style, and conflict with the ex-partner in the whole sample and males, and between Storge and the mean conflict in construing of the current and ex-partner in females. The remaining significant correlations between love styles and conflict scores were between a Pragma love style in men and a low mean level of conflict in construing of the current and ex-partner but a high level of conflict in construing of the closest person with whom there was no sexual involvement.

A further significant finding was a correlation between high relationship satisfaction, as meas-

ured by the Relationship Assessment Scale, and conflict associated with the supplied construct 'sexually attractive – unattractive' (r = 0.39; p<0.05; 2-tailed).

Table 4. Significant Pearson correlations between interview content analysis scales and love styles in Study 2

Content Analysis Scales	Love Styles		
	Mania	Pragma	Agape
Pawn	- .36(*)	- 0.34 (*)	
Origin			-0.34(*)
Cognitive Anxiety			-0.48(*)

() = 2-tailed; \* = p<0.05; \*\* = p<0.01

Turning to participants' interview responses, the content of their descriptions of their relationships with their partners, when coded using Viney and Westbrook's content analysis scales, was found to show some relationships with love styles (see Table 4). The scales with which significant correlations were obtained were Origin and Pawn (indicating, respectively, whether the person considers that s/he has choice or is controlled) and Cognitive Anxiety (indicating an inability to anticipate events). Of rather more interest were participants' definitions of love and descriptions of their ideal relationships. For example, the vast majority of them defined love in companionate rather than passionate terms, and also viewed their ideal relationship in this way. The percentages of responses to these two interview questions that were classified by the researcher (ES) as falling in the category of companionate love were 83.8 and 94.6 respectively. Despite this finding, the interview responses of our participants displayed a clear acknowledgement that there may be numerous alternative constructions of love. To quote Steve,

*love is more a category than something itself, it could be lots of different things. I think most of the time love is when you think you are in love..like strong feelings which we consider as love when we endure them like jealousy and things like*

*that but when it's finished you don't think that's love before..What I really think is that love is an illusion so it only works if you believe in it.*

Similarly Kate said that:

*I think that there is different types of love, some people I know it's purely physical but I don't personally see that as love, I see that more as lust personally and there's different...like in the sense that if you know that the other person needs you more than them...some people are the sort of people that really need to help someone so they fall in love with the people that need help, there are probably people who argue all the time and stuff...even though I know those people love each other I don't think they love each other in the right sense sort of thing.*

Other participants appeared to view love in terms of a progression from a passionate to a companionate relationship. For example, in Anne's view:

*love comes in two forms: lust love, when you want to be with someone I suppose, you lust after them, you find really attractive, and when you are with them it develops into a friendship love, a mutual understanding, you can confide in each other and talk to each other.*

For Jill,

*there is one love, but people have different perspectives so it's about finding someone with the similar view of what love is to you because that way you can compromise the least, so it's about having the same expectations.*

## Discussion

Only in Study 1 was there direct support for the first hypothesis, in that greater conflict was associated with romantic partners than with closest significant others. However, in both studies con-

flict associated with romantic partners was greater than that associated with significant others who were not family members, whereas construing of family members was as conflictual as that of romantic partners.

Both studies also provided some support for the second hypothesis in that conflict associated with romantic partners was related to passionate love styles, namely Eros in Study 1 and Mania, albeit only in females, in Study 2. The relationship in Study 2 between low conflict in construing of partners and a game-playing love style, Ludus, is perhaps also not unexpected. Hall et al. (1991) consider the ludic individual to be low in complexity of construing and to have relationships based on a shallow foundation in which at any hint of conflict he or she will move on to another relationship. There is therefore less likelihood of such an individual experiencing conflict in a romantic relationship.

The relationships in Study 2 between Storge, the friendship-based love style, and conflict in the construing of partners, particularly ex-partners, are harder to explain. However, in the view of Hall et al. (1991), storgic individuals are likely to have complex love construct systems and their relationships 'should withstand conflict'. It may be that for such individuals a considerably higher level of conflict in construing of their partner would be necessary to lead to a breakdown of the relationship than would be the case in non-storgic individuals. If this were so, it would follow that storgic individuals would show more conflict in their construing of their ex-partner than would people who do not subscribe to this love style.

Further significant correlations between love styles and conflict in Study 2 were those between Pragma and low conflict in construing of partners but high conflict in construing of the closest other person. It is not surprising that there is little conflict in the way in which a pragmatically chosen partner is construed since, to quote Hall et al. (1991, p. 143), 'Conflict should not threaten an intellectually based relationship'. Such pragmatism may not be so evident in the individual's choice of close friends.

The relationship in Study 2 between relationship satisfaction and a high degree of conflict associated with the construct concerning sexual attraction may at first sight appear surprising.

However, it may be speculated that a high level of conflict in construing of sexual attraction could indicate that this in an area associated not only with anxiety but also with a degree of excitement, and hence possibly a more fulfilling sexual relationship.

Some of the relationships between scores on the interview content analysis scales and love styles are difficult to explain. It was not unexpected, though, that those who saw themselves as pawns, with little control, in their relationships with their partners also tended to show the consuming, mania love style. Perhaps more surprising is that these young people, in their interviews, appeared to favour companionate rather than passionate love. However, this finding is consistent with some previous research (Fehr, 2006). The emphasis by some of the participants on the importance of sharing, or at least understanding, one's partner's construction of love has also been pointed out by researchers on the topic. For example, Murstein (1988) considers that:

*...many couples believe that they share a common definition when in fact they do not. Both may argue that they love the other, but the other does not love them, and if they have different definitions of love, they are probably correct. Couples probably need to be educated to respect their partner's differences, particularly in their concept of love (p. 34).*

A similar point has been made by Sternberg (1998) in relation to the stories about love that individuals develop and then attempt to live out. He has found relationship satisfaction to be less when there is a discrepancy in the partners' stories (Sternberg, Hojjat, & Barnes, 2001).

Commonalities and contrasts in partners' construing of love relationships may therefore be a useful focus of therapy for couples. Amongst the methods that may be used to explore this area, in addition to interviews and love style measures, is Ryle and Breen's (1972) double dyad grid. This involves each member of a couple completing a repertory grid in which the elements are relationships, and then another grid as they imagine their partner would have completed it. For example, use of this method with Joan and Chris, whose two-year marriage was

unconsummated, ostensibly because of Joan's vaginismus, indicated that their construing of relationships was very dissimilar. Of particular note was that Chris viewed 'affectionate' relationships as being associated with 'worrying about the least little thing', and being 'frightened of hurting' the other person, but not being 'sexually attracted' to them. Joan, however, did not contrast affection and sexual attraction and was unaware that her husband did this. While they both considered that when their relationship was going well they were more affectionate towards, and more frightened of hurting each other, Chris was considerable less sexually attracted to Joan at such times. In view of his apparent inability to associate sexual and affectionate feelings, it was not surprising that Chris decided to terminate sex therapy as soon as this appeared to be making some progress. A similar pattern of contrasting of affection with sexual attraction, which in turn was associated with feelings of hostility, was shown by Pete, who sought help together with his wife, Sheila, because of her lack of sexual interest in him. They argued constantly, but Pete's grid indicated that at such times, when their relationship was viewed as going badly, he felt much more sexually attracted towards her, this perhaps giving him some reason to precipitate and perpetuate conflict situations between them. As with Joan and Chris, Sheila was quite unaware of this aspect of her husband's construing.

## CONCLUSIONS

We have provided some evidence that romantic love is associated with conflict in construing of the beloved, and that such a pattern is more likely in individuals with particular love styles. Romantic love would therefore not appear to be purely an experience of validation, as McCoy's personal construct definition of love might imply. Instead the excitement that it offers might be more a result of a bitter-sweet mixture of validation and invalidation (although the emphasis on validation and invalidation should not be taken to imply that we view love as necessarily only a dyadic phenomenon).

Our research has also provided further indications of the usefulness of Bell's (2004) grid

measure of conflict. However, it is, of course, absurd to think that the essence of love could ever be captured with a repertory grid or by the 'rational' examination discussed by Kelly (1977). For a fuller understanding of love, there is still no better place to turn than art and literature, and it is therefore no surprise that some personal construct psychologists (e.g. Brophy, 2004; Mair, 1989) have chosen poetic means to provide eloquent explorations of this subject. We shall therefore leave the last words to one of these authors:

*Love and pain live together  
Love destroys just as it makes  
To live in love is  
To live with pain*

*Why would anybody do it?  
Why go in  
For all that pain?*

(Mair, 1989, p. 158)

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