

Passionate and Companionate Love in Newlywed Couples

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### Abstract

According to Hatfield & Walster (1981), the passage of time should have a very different effect on passionate vs. companionate love. Passionate love should decline fairly quickly...while companionate love should remain fairly stable over time.

To test this hypothesis, we interviewed 53 newlywed couples, both immediately after their marriages and then one year later, when presumably the "honeymoon was over." The data suggest Hatfield & Walster were wrong. Time did have a corrosive effect on love---but it had an equally corrosive effect on passionate and on companionate love.

Also examined in this study was how men and women differ in how much they passionately and companionately love. Women were found to companionately love more than men, while no gender difference was found in the amount of passionate love reported.

Finally, it was also found that men and women did not differ in amount of negative feelings experienced in the relationship. Furthermore, the passage of one year of marriage had no effect on amount of negative emotions expressed.

## Passionate and Companionate Love in Newlywed Couples

In almost every theoretical approach to it, love has been dichotomized into what could be generically referred to as irrational and rational love. The irrational aspect of love has been variously called romantic love (Burgess, 1926; Driscoll et al., 1972; Rubin, 1970; 1973), unreasonable love (Lilar, 1965), emotional love (Turner, 1970), limerence (Tennov, 1979), and passionate love (Hatfield & Walster, 1981; Safilios-Rothschild, 1977). The rational aspect of love has been variously called conjugal love (Burgess, 1926; Driscoll et al., 1972), reasonable love (Lilar, 1965), sentimental love (Turner, 1970), affectionate love (Safilios-Rothschild, 1977), and companionate love (Hatfield & Walster, 1981). We will use the terms passionate love and companionate love to describe the possible bidimensional nature of love experienced in intimate relations.

Passionate love can be described as an intensely emotional state, associated with tender and sexual feelings. Hatfield & Walster (1978) define passionate love in the following way:

A state of intense absorption in another. Sometimes lovers are those who long for their partners and for complete fulfillment. Sometimes lovers are those who are ecstatic at finally having attained their partner's love and, momentarily, complete fulfillment.  
A state of intense physiological arousal.

(p. 9)

Companionate love, on the other hand, is a low-key emotion, with feelings of friendly affection and deep attachment. It has been described as involving friendship, understanding, and a concern for the welfare of the

other (Safilios-Rothschild, 1977). Hatfield & Walster (1978) describe companionate love as, "The affection we feel for those with whom our lives are deeply entwined." (p. 9).

In this study we will examine passionate and companionate love in young married couples. In particular, we will address the following questions: Do husbands and wives differ in how much they passionately vs. companionately love each other? What effect does passage of time have on passionate vs. companionate love? In addition, we will examine possible negative emotions experienced in the relationship, and how the experience of these emotions change with time.

#### Gender Differences in Passionate and Companionate Love

According to a cultural stereotype, women love and men work. This cultural stereotype has been echoed by a wide array of psychologists and sociologists. (See, for example, Parsons, 1959; Langhorn & Secord, 1955; or Parsons & Bales, 1955). Modern feminists also agree that love is more important for women than for men. For example, in the Dialectic of Sex, Firestone (1970) writes:

That women live for love and men live for work is a truism... Men were thinking, writing, and creating, because women were pouring their energies into those men; women... are preoccupied with love.

(pp. 126-127).

However, the data on possible gender differences in love are complicated and do not unequivocally support the cultural stereotype. The evidence suggests that whether males or females are defined to love more depends on what type

of love is being examined and how love is measured.

When passionate (or romantic) love is examined, it has sometimes been found that women love more, sometimes that men love more, and sometimes that there are no differences between men and women. The results from studies examining "attitudes" toward love suggest that men have a more romantic or passionate orientation than do women (Hobart, 1958; Knox & Sporkowski, 1968; Rubin, 1975). For example, men are more likely than women to agree with such statements as, "To be truly in love is to be in love forever" and "A person should marry whomever he loves regardless of social position." In contrast, in studies examining feelings, women have been found to be more passionate or romantic than men. For example, Kanin et al. (1970) asked men and women to describe how they felt when they were in love. Women were more likely than men to say they experienced such love reactions symptomatic of passionate love as "felt like I was floating on a cloud" and "felt like I wanted to run, jump, and scream". Dion & Dion (1973) also found that women felt more intense and euphoric when in love than did men. And finally, in studies where respondents are specifically asked how much they passionately or romantically love their partner, no differences have been found between men and women in how much they love their partner (Rubin, 1973; Sprecher-Fisher, 1980).

When it comes to companionate love, however, the results are more clearcut---and more supportive of the cultural stereotype of women being more loving. In general, it has been found that women like and companionately love their partners more than they are liked and companionately loved in return. Knox & Sporkowski (1968) found that women tended to be more conjugal on their attitudes toward love than were college men. Rubin (1973) found that women liked their boyfriends somewhat more than they were liked

in return. And in studies asking men and women how much they companionately love their partners, women have reported higher amounts of companionate love than men (Sprecher-Fisher, 1980)

Because all of the above studies were done with dating couples, less is known about gender differences in love during marriage. This study will explore how husbands and wives differ in how much they passionately vs. companionately love each other.

### Changes Over Time in Passionate vs. Companionate Love

In addition to examining gender differences in love, we will also examine how love changes over time for both men and women. According to folklore, passionate love is fragile and lasts for only a short time. If the couple is lucky, passionate love evolves into companionate love, which is considered to be a robust kind of love that can, and often does, last a lifetime. Safilios-Rothschild (1977) describes the progression from passionate love to companionate love:

Sometimes romantic passion slowly diminishes in strength and becomes transformed into a stable and tender "affectionate love" that is able to withstand the responsibility, problems, and routine, and even boredom that comes with a lasting relationship.

(p. 10)

This idea of a linear passage from passion to companionship has been incorporated into stage theories of relationship development. Goldstine et al. (1977), for example, identified three stages through which relationships pass. In Stage 1, there is excitement and vulnerability--- which are characteristics of passionate love. In Stage 2, a period of disillusionment occurs during which the passion wanes. For those couples who reach Stage 3, it is a period when companionate love becomes more

prominent. Expectations for each other become realistic, and a sense of security develops in the relationship.

In a different stage model of relationship development, Coleman (1977) identified five stages: 1) recognition 2) engagement 3) harmony 4) discordance 5) resolution. In the second and third stages, characteristics of passionate love, such as idealization and physical attraction, are most intense. In the resolution stage, a more realistic type of love (companionate love) begins to develop.

Both longitudinal and cross-sectional studies exist to suggest that feelings of love do change over the course of a relationship as folklore and these stage theories would suggest. Driscoll et al. (1972) interviewed dating and married couples early in their relationships, and then again several months later. They found that, at the beginning of an affair, most couples were romantically in love. As their relationships developed, however, the "love" couples expressed for one another began to sound less and less like passion---and more and more like friendship and companionship. Pam (1976) also found that intensity of love feelings declined over a 6-month period. In a cross-sectional study, Cimbalò et al. (1976) interviewed couples married for durations ranging from 0 to 15 years. They asked the couples to fill out Rubin's (1970) Liking and Loving scales. They found that the longer a couple had been married, the less passionately (romantically) the husband and wife loved one another. The liking expressed for each other, however, remained uniformly high.<sup>1</sup>

In this study, we will explore how both passionate and companionate love change over one year of marriage.

### Dark Side of Love

Theorists have recognized that intimates may feel both intensely positive and intensely negative emotions. For example, such negative emotions as anger, resentment, and depression may be experienced within an intimate relationship. Perlmutter & Hatfield (1980) observe that one of the primary characteristics of intimate relationships is:

Intensity of feelings: Intimates care about one another.

Most intimates love one another. Of course people are complex and almost often intimates' deepest feelings of love are laced with dislike and hatred. Occasionally intimates hate one another. Some couples have battled intimately for 25 years or more. But whatever it is that intimates feel, they feel intensely.

(p. 18)

That negative feelings are an integral part of intimacy is indicated by work done by Braiker & Kelley (1979). In a set of exploratory studies, they found that a principal dimension in descriptions married couples gave of the development of their relationship is what the researchers termed "conflict-negativity". This factor included feeling angry and resentful toward the partner and communicating negative feelings. The researchers found that the amount of conflict-negativity in the relationships was independent of the amount of love expressed. Those couples who reported high negative feelings were not necessarily less likely to report high love feelings. The researchers also found that the overall degree of reported conflict-negativity tended to increase and then finally level off as the relationship progressed.



satisfaction with sex, and the perceived stability of the marriage.

(See Traupmann, 1978, and Utne, 1978, for a complete description of these procedures).

### Measures

#### Assessing Passionate and Companionate Love:

During the interview, respondents were asked:

People seem to experience two different kinds of love; we call them "passionate love" and "companionate love". Passionate love could be described as a wildly emotional state, with associated tender and sexual feelings, elation and pain, anxiety and relief. Companionate love involves more low-keyed emotion, with feelings of friendly affection and deep attachment. Using the response scale below, and thinking over the last six months or so, answer our questions about these feelings in your marriage.

- (1) What is the level of passionate love that you feel for your partner?
  - (2) What is the level of passionate love that your partner feels for you?
  - (3) What is the level of companionate love that you feel for your partner?
  - (4) What is the level of companionate love that your partner feels for you?
1. None at all
  2. Very little
  3. Some
  4. A great deal
  5. A tremendous amount

Assessing Resentment/Hostility and Depression:

Later in the interview, respondents were asked:

Relationships go through stages; sometimes, for a period, the wife feels seething resentment toward her husband---and the way he treats her. At other times she may feel hostile or depressed. Her husband may feel the same way. Sometimes they will express these feelings, other times they will keep them inside. Thinking over the last six months or so:

- (1) What is the level of resentment that you feel toward your partner?
- (2) What is the level of resentment that your partner feels for you?
- (3) What is the level of hostility that you feel toward your partner?
- (4) What is the level of hostility that your partner feels toward you?
- (5) What is the level of depression that you feel as a result of the relationship?
- (6) What is the level of depression that your partner feels as a result of the relationship?
  1. None at all
  2. Very little
  3. Some
  4. A great deal
  5. A tremendous amount

## Results and Discussion

We will now examine and discuss the results for the issues previously posed:

### Gender Differences in Passionate and Companionate Love

Overall, men and women reported "a great deal" of passionate love feelings for their partner. As indicated in Table 1, no difference was found between men and women in the amount of passionate love reported ( $F(1,104) = .66, n.s.$ ).

For companionate love, men and women reported feeling from "a great deal" to "a tremendous amount". Women, however, were significantly more likely to feel companionate love than men ( $F(1,104) = 11.45; p < .001$ ).

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 Insert Table 1 about here  
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These results, in combination with the studies reported earlier for dating couples, suggest that there may be a real gender difference in companionate love. It may be that, while men and women love with equal passion, dating and married women companionately love their partner more than they are companionately loved in return.

### Changes Over Time in Passionate vs. Companionate Love

Based upon what folklore and the literature suggest, we expected the passage of time to have different effects on passionate love vs. companionate love. Passionate love should decline over time, while companionate love should remain fairly stable. Thus, a significant length of relationship x type-of-love interaction was expected.

In order to test this hypothesis, we utilized a 2 x 2 x 2 factorial analysis of variance design, which included: sex of respondent (male vs. female), time (original interview vs. interview one year later), and type-of-love (passionate vs. companionate love). In this design, time and type-of-love were considered to be within subject factors.

When we examine Tables 1 and 2<sup>4</sup> and Figure 1, we see that in this newlywed sample, the hypothesized interaction was not supported.

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 Insert Table 2 and Figure 1 about here  
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As Table 2 indicates, time did indeed seem to have a corrosive effect on love ( $F(1,104) = 13.81, p < .001$ ), but it seemed to be no more damaging to passionate love than to companionate love (Interaction  $F(1,104)$  for time x type-of-love = .57, n.s.).

Although time did seem to have a corrosive effect on love, couples still reported a fairly intense level of love during the second year, even though "the honeymoon was ostensibly over". At the time of the marriage, men and women started out feeling "a great deal" of passionate love...and in between "a great deal" and "a tremendous amount" of companionate love for one another. A year later, these feelings were still surprisingly high. Couples reported feeling in between "some" and "a great deal" of passionate love, and in between "a great deal" and "a tremendous amount" of companionate love.

It could be argued that it is the courtship period that passionate love reaches its peak and then declines precipitously, and thus the chosen sample was the wrong one to test the type-of-love x time interaction. However, casually and steady dating couples have been asked about their passionate and

companionate feelings in other survey studies (see Walster et al., 1978). It is the newlywed group, however, that passionate love seems to be the highest. It could also be argued that couples should be re-interviewed in multiple waves---after 5 years, 10 years, and 25 years of marriage. Perhaps only after several years of marriage will passionate love be found to wane. Hopefully, such a study will be conducted in the future.

### Dark Side of Love

As observed earlier, intimates feel intensely about one another--- both intensely positive and intensely negative. Do men and women differ in the negative feelings experienced? How do negative feelings change over the first year of marriage for men and women?

To explore these questions, we constructed two indexes of negative feelings. Because the emotions of resentment and hostility are both emotions directed to the partner, they were averaged to form an index of resentment/hostility toward the partner. Depression, which is considered to be "aggression turned inward", was analyzed separately.

In general, both men and women reported between "none at all" and "very little" resentment/hostility and "very little" depression in the relationship. Clearly (and fortunately), husbands and wives feel more positive emotions (passionate and companionate love) than negative emotions.

While there was a tendency for women to experience more negative emotions, these differences were not significant ( $F(1,104) = 3.29$  and  $1.71$ , respectively, n.s.). Of course, whether there are gender differences in other types of negative emotions (i.e., frustration, jealousy, anxiety) will need to be explored in future studies.

It also appears that time did not have an effect on the dark side of love (see Table 1). At the time of the marriage, couples expressed

between "none at all" and "very little" resentment/hostility and depression. One year later, they still felt the same slight unease about things ( $F(1,104) = 1.78$  and  $.77$ , n.s., respectively). The data suggest, then, that during the first year of marriage, men and women's intimate relationships remain laced with a small amount of hostility/resentment and depression. "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose." These results are consistent with the work done by Braiker & Kelley (1979) on the development of close relationships. They found in their sample of couples that negative feelings increased in the dating stage of the relationship, but then leveled off as the relationship evolved into marriage and beyond.

#### Summary

A two-wave panel study of 53 newly married couples was conducted. Women were found to companionately love more than men, which is consistent with research done on dating couples. No difference was found between men and women in how much they passionately loved. While it was expected that time would have a more corrosive effect on passionate love than on companionate love, time was not discriminating in its effects. Both passionate and companionate love diminished slightly over the course of a year of marriage. A step for future studies investigating these issues will be to go beyond the one-item global measures and measure more validly and reliably the different dimensions to passionate and companionate love. In addition, multi-wave panel studies will be able to better capture the non-static nature of love in marriage.

Negative emotions were also examined in this study. No difference was found between men and women in the amount of hostility/resentment and depression they reported. In addition, the amount of negative emotions experienced did not seem to be affected by the passage of time.

## Footnotes

1. It is hard to say just how Rubin's Liking and Loving Scales are related to the Passionate and Companionate Loving scales. Rubin argued that liking involved appreciation of the other person, respect, and a feeling that the couple has much in common. Love includes such elements as idealization of the other, tenderness, responsibility, the longing to serve and be served by the loved one, intimacy, the desire to show emotions and experiences, sexual attraction, the exclusive and absorptive nature of the relationship, and finally, the couples' relative lack of concern with social norms and constraints. Some of the aspects of Love sound like Passionate Love others like Companionate Love. Thus it is not possible to determine to what extent the scales overlap.
2. We were of course worried that the 56 couples who participated in Year 1, and only Year 1, might differ in some critical way from the 53 couples who were available to participate in both the Year 1 and Year 2 followup. To the best of our knowledge they do not. Dr. David Nerenz compared those couples who came for the follow-up interview with those who did not on all of the variables we assessed at Time 1 (33 variables). This comparison revealed no significant differences above the chance level.
3. Although we realize that since husband and wife's responses may be dependent, we chose not to use the couple as the basic unit of analysis. Had we adopted this procedure, we would not have been able to compare husbands' and wives' responses--a central interest in this paper. Lack of independence between husbands and wives did not seem to be so serious a problem as to outweigh the advantages of being able to compare their responses.
4. In Table 1, for the readers interest, we present the Fs for each of the measures--Passionate love, Companionate Love, Resentment and Hostility,

and Depression about the Relationship--separately. Table 2 presents the Fs which are appropriate to testing our hypotheses--i.e., the impact of sex of respondent x time on passionate + companionate love and passionate vs. companionate love.

5. See Traupmann, J. and Hatfield, E. (1981) for documentation that dating couples and newlyweds are much alike in their passionate and companionate feelings for one another.



Figure 1

The Impact of Sex and Time on Passionate

and Companionate Love

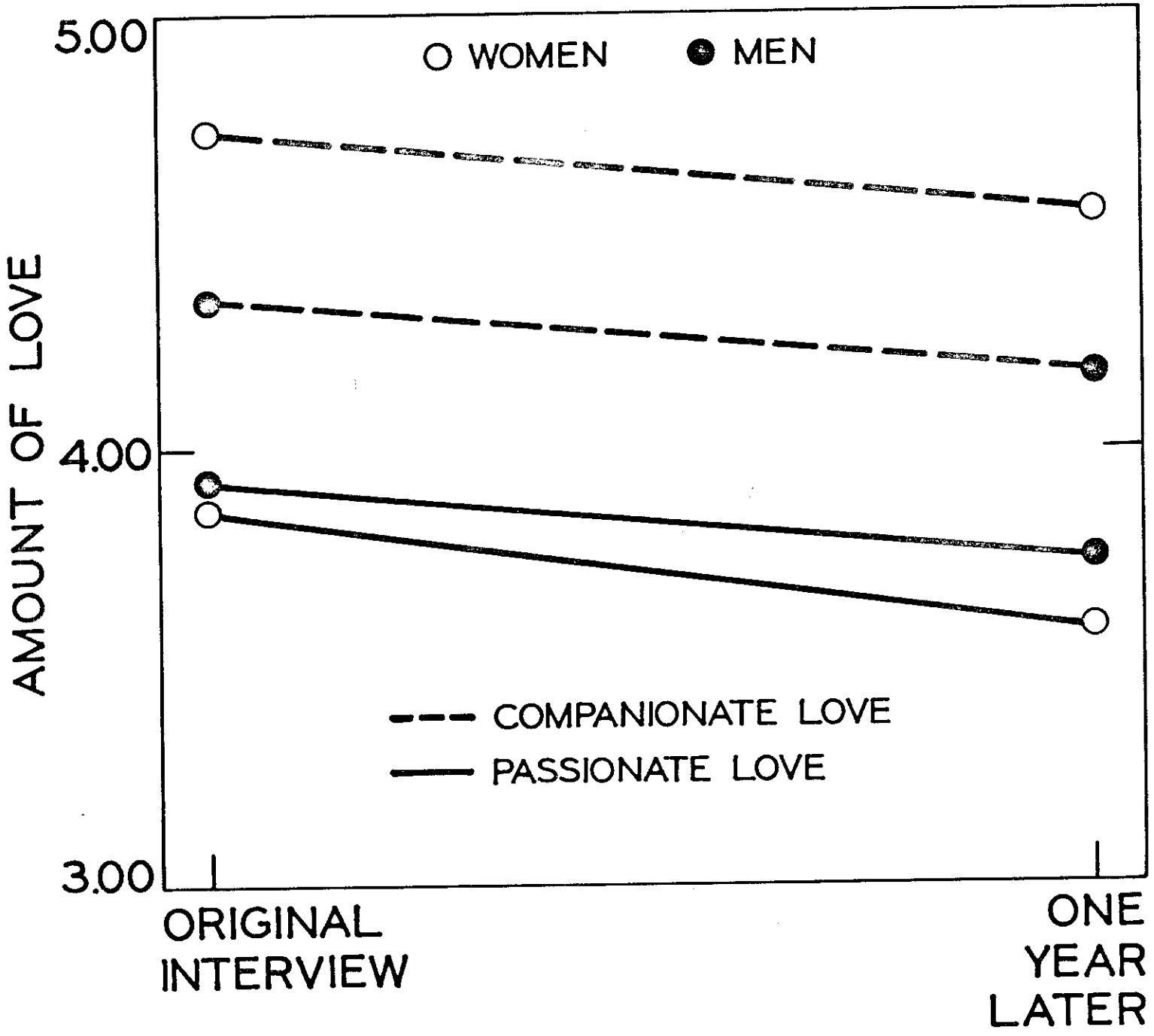


Table 1

## Newlywed Couples'

## Feelings for Their Partners

	(N)	How much Passionate love do you feel for your partner?	How much Companionate love do you feel for your partner?	How much resentment + hostility do you feel for your partner?	How much depression do you feel about your relationship?
Newlyweds: (Original Interview)					
Men	53	3.96	4.38	1.63	1.60
	S.D.	(.80)	(.81)	(.68)	(.74)
Women	53	3.90	4.72	1.85	1.85
	S.D.	(.69)	(.54)	(.62)	(.77)
Newlyweds: (1 year later)					
Men	53	3.77	4.19	1.74	1.74
	S.D.	(.89)	(.71)	(.62)	(.79)
Women	53	3.60	4.57	1.93	1.85
	S.D.	(.77)	(.57)	(.83)	(.91)

F - Tests

Main Effect: Sex	.66	11.45***	3.29	1.71
Main Effect: Time	10.48**	5.22*	1.78	.77
Interaction: Sex x Time	.56	.06	.02	.77

dif. = 1/104

\* p &lt; .05

\*\* p &lt; .01

\*\*\* p &lt; .001

Table 2  
Anova for Ratings of  
Passionate and Companionate Love

<u>Newlywed Sample</u>	<u>d.f.</u>	<u>Mean Square</u>	<u>F</u>
<u>Source</u>			
Main effect: Sex	1	1.60	1.77
Subjects/Sex	104	.90	-
Main effect: Time	1	4.57	13.81***
Interaction: Sex x Time	1	.04	.11
Subjects/Sex x Time	104	.33	-
Main effect: Type of Love	1	44.92	62.13***
Interaction: Sex x Type of Love	1	5.90	8.16***
Subjects/Sex x Type	104	.72	-
Interaction: Time x Type of Love	1	.15	.57
Interaction: Sex x Time x Type of Love	1	.15	.57
Subjects/All	104	.27	-

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