

Exploring the Dynamics of Arranged Marriage in a Cultural Context

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ABSTRACT

Arranged marriage remains popular in many regions due to its emphasis on maintaining harmony in the family. Based on attachment theory and life course viewpoint theory, this study looked at how arranged marriage works in a cultural setting. The study used the descriptive correlational research design. There were 57 married couples who responded to the research instruments. The questionnaire on love developed in marriage was based on Johnson & Rusbult (2019); and the items on fulfillment in marriage was adapted from **Gottman & Silver** (2015). To organize the data, descriptive statistics, Kruskal-Wallis and Spearman's rho were used. The results indicated that most of them had been married for at least five years. Marital satisfaction did not significantly differ considering the number of years married, the level of educational attainment, and the age of the participants when they got married. A strong positive link was found between the perception of love growth and marital happiness, suggesting that as love grows, so does marital happiness with communication, emotional closeness, and resolving conflicts between partners as important in their sense of fulfillment as couples.

Keywords: Arranged Marriage, Cultural Context, Marital Fulfillment, Perception of Love developed in Marriage

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is still a very important part of society, heavily influenced by culture and religion, particularly in communities that emphasize group harmony. The marriage traditions of the Maguindanaon people in the Philippines demonstrate how cultural beliefs continue to shape marriage practices. Recent study by Kirab, et.al. (2025) showed that rituals like pangëngërung and salangguni are key expressions of community unity and identity, blending Islamic faith with local customs. The authors found that these practices show the community's dedication to preserving their culture while adapting to modern life. Despite modern changes, these rituals still play a significant role in strengthening social connections and shared values (Kumar, S., & Singh,(2024). On the other hand, arranged marriages remain a common practice. Unlike love marriages, where people choose their own partners based on love and attraction, arranged marriages involve families or community leaders in selecting partners. These choices are often based on factors like social standing, religion, financial stability, and shared family values, rather than romantic love. Laws like the Family Code of the Philippines highlight the importance and permanence of marriage. Marriage is considered the basic building block of society, a sacred and lifelong commitment that promotes moral values, respect, and shared responsibilities between partners.

This study addressed the research gap of a lack of exploration into the specific mechanisms through which perceptions of love developed within marriage influence marital fulfillment. It also examined if their characteristics served as sources of variation in this fulfillment. This study provides a valuable foundation

for future research on the changing dynamics of arranged marriages across different cultures. It highlights the intersection of tradition, social norms, and individual choice, offering insights for comparative and interdisciplinary studies. It also encourages further exploration of psychological, economic, gender, and global influences on arranged marriage systems in the modern world.

Using the Life Course Perspective (Hutchison, 2019) and Attachment Theory (Feeny & Collins, 2020), this study explored if their marital fulfillment significantly differ considering years in marriage, educational attainment, and age when married. Stenberg's Triangular Theory of Love was likewise used to explain how the couple's ideas about love changed after they got married. It is one of the best ways to understand love in relationships, according to Popado (2002) and EBSCO (2021). These theories provide insights into how life transitions and emotional bonds shape relationship fulfillment. The goal is to offer useful guidance for couples, counselors, and social workers in supporting lasting, fulfilling marriages.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study used descriptive correlational research design. This begins with the collection and analysis of quantitative data on the relationships among variables related to the characteristics of the participants, perception of love developed in marriage, and fulfillment in marriage. The participants are 57 arranged married couples whose years in marriage reached 5 years. Due to the limited participants whose marriage is arranged, the researcher opted to use total enumeration. The questionnaire on love developed in marriage was based on Johnson & Rusbult (2019); and the items on fulfillment in marriage was adapted from **Gottman & Silver** (2015). The items in the research instruments were pilot tested and the results were subjected to Cronbach alpha reliability test. The **items had strong internal consistency** (Perception of Love Developed in Marriage got $\alpha = 0.908$; Fulfillment in Marriage got $\alpha = 0.893$). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Kruskal-Wallis and Spearman's rho (the nonparametric equivalent of analysis of variance and Pearson's r which were used because the data sets were not normally distributed) for determining differences in marital fulfillment **considering participant characteristics and the association between participants' perception of love developed in marriage and their fulfillment in marriage respectively.**

RESULTS

The results of the study are shown in the tables that follow. The results of the Kruskal-Wallis H test is shown in Table 1, which reveal that there are no significant differences in their fulfillment in marriage considering years in marriage, educational attainment, and age when married. Thus, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected, implying that these characteristics are not sources of variation in their fulfillment in marriage.

Table 1

Result of the Test of Difference in their Fulfillment in Marriage considering Participant's Characteristics

YEARS IN MARRIAGE	N	Mean Rank	Kruskall Wallis H	p	Decision
5-10 years married	18	72.06	5.50	.139	Not significant
11-15 years married	32	50.50			
16-20 years married	34	54.03			
21 and above years married	30	60.17			

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT					
Less than High School	36	53.83	.916	.821	Not Significant
High School Graduate	31	61.56			
College Level	25	57.9			
College Graduate	22	57.32			
AGE WHEN MARRIED					
15-22 years old	58	62.45	5.78	.055	Not Significant
23-27 years old	37	46.77			
28 years old & above	19	63.29			

Whether they have been married for 5 years or more than 21 years, their sense of fulfillment does not vary. The results indicate the test of difference in the participants' fulfillment in marriage considering their characteristics.

Table 2 presents the participants' perception of love developed in marriage. The participants of this study indicated happiness with all the main aspects of their marriage. It shows that they are capable persons who can work effectively together, strengthening their relationship. Excellent communication was clear, given a standard deviation of 0.59 and scores averaging 3.83. Open, honest communication is really essential if one wants to approach and build trust. This reflects what Gottman and Gottman (2024) said that open communication is an "emotional bank account." When people engage positively, they have a supply of compassion they can rely on throughout difficult times.

Table 2

Perception of Love Developed in Marriage

Range	Description	Frequency	%
4.51-5.00	Strongly Agree	54	47.37
3.51-4.50	Agree	52	45.61
2.51-3.50	Moderate	8	7.02
1.51-2.50	Disagree	0	0.00
1.00-1.50	Strongly Disagree	0	0.00
	Total	114	100.0
	Description	Agree	
	SD	0.50	

Survey participants believed that love in a marriage gets better over time. Sixty three percent of the participants said they thought it was important for love to grow in a relationship to have an emotional connection, shared memories, and a sense of belonging. Some participants (22.8%) thought that love meant sexual desire and emotion. The answers from sixteen people, or 14%, showed a more realistic or duty-bound view of love, which was often shaped by family or social norms. As McGuire (2015) said that the results show that marriage is sometimes seen as a tie that makes love greater. A lot of couples find stability and happiness in their relationships through close friendships, regular conversation, and respecting each other. According to Diamond and Huebner (2019) and Schoenfeld and Bredow (2021), this is how "romantic love" changes into "compassionate love."

The participants in this study mostly behaved in ways that suggested they loved each other for a long time.

Culture also played a big role in how the people in the study thought about love. Many of the Muslim couples who took part said they planned their wedding around their religion and culture. They said they were very happy in their marriage and became close emotionally over time, even though they hadn't felt strong love at first. To be married in an Islamic way, there is a need for couples to be loyal, which means working together to reach a shared goal, and have a stable emotional relationship. The works of Le and Agnew (2022) and Choi and Jin (2021) show how society shapes how people think about and show love. People in individualistic societies saw love as a way to feel good about themselves and make strong emotional bonds. People in collectivist societies see love as a long-term commitment and a shared task. These differences didn't change the results of Randall and Bodenmann's (2020) study: couples who were honest with each other, caring, and helped each other through tough times said they loved and valued each other more. In conclusion, the study show that love within marriage is dynamic and culturally shaped, moving beyond romantic ideals into realms of emotional maturity, resilience, and shared growth.

Table 3

Participants' Fulfillment in Marriage

Dimensions	Mean	Interpretation	SD
Communication	3.83	High	0.59
Emotional Support	4.06	High	0.55
Quality Time	4.18	High	0.65
Conflict Resolution	3.86	High	0.53
Problem-Solving	4.01	High	0.51
Overall Fulfillment in Marriage	3.99	High	0.46

This table shows that the couples in this study reported being highly satisfied in all major areas of their marriage. This indicates that they not only have individual strengths but also work well together, boosting the overall quality of their relationship. Communication was especially strong, with an average mean of 3.83 (with a standard deviation of 0.59). This highlights how important clear and understanding conversations are for building intimacy and trust. As Gottman and Gottman (2024) suggested, this kind of open communication acts like an "emotional bank account" for the marriage, where positive interactions build a reserve of goodwill that can be used during difficult periods.

The dimension of Emotional Support ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.55$) highlights the spouses' ability to provide comfort, reassurance, and validation when the other is distressed. This finding aligns with Emotionally Focused Therapy's emphasis on secure emotional bonding where partners serve as safe havens and secure bases for one another (Johnson, 2021). In this view, high emotional support signifies not just momentary kindness, but the deep attachment security that undergirds resilience in the face of stressors.

Arguably, the most pronounced strength among these couples is their prioritization of Quality Time ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.65$). This aligns with what Chapman (2015) found that shared activities and undivided attention are expressions of the core "love languages," affirming that couples who deliberately carve out moments to connect establish shared memories and reinforce their relational identity. Whether through simple rituals such as nightly check-ins or weekly date nights or through more elaborate joint pursuits, spending focused time together appears to solidify these marriages' sense of partnership.

When it comes to Conflict Resolution ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 0.53$) and Problem-Solving ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 0.51$), participants again rated themselves highly, indicating that they not only manage disagreements effectively but do so in ways that promote collective ownership of solutions. Bandura's (2024) concept of collective

efficacy is directly applicable here: couples who believe in their shared capacity to navigate difficulties tend to exhibit greater perseverance and less destructive reactivity during disputes. Furthermore, Gottman and Gottman (2024) outline specific repair strategies such as genuine apologies, humor, and de-escalating physiological arousal that these high-scoring couples likely employ to transform potential gridlock into meaningful dialogue.

DISCUSSION

Majority of participants had been married for over ten years, implying that they are in the later stages of their marriage. In terms of formal education, majority had very limited formal education; and most of them were 17-22 years when they got married. Marital fulfillment did not significantly differ considering years in marriage, level of education, or the age at which they got married, implying that marital fulfillment is not determined by demographic factors but is more closely related to the quality of the couple's relations, including how they communicate, resolve conflicts and maintain emotional closeness. These interpersonal dynamics seem to have a stronger influence on marital fulfillment than age, education or duration of the marriage. Participants described love in their marriage as something that grows and matures over time, shaped by emotional connection, shared experiences, and mutual understanding.

Cultural context also played an important role. Many participants in arranged marriages reported strong emotional bonds that developed over time, highlighting the importance of commitment and shared values. Participants experience generally high marital communication fulfillment, with clear expression, active listening, and open dialogue being common. Few reported very high levels, suggesting communication breakdowns are rare. While communication is generally a strength, some moderate and low ratings point to the need for support programs to help couples improve their communication skills. The participants' perception of love developed in marriage is significantly associated with their marital fulfillment with emotional support having the highest association followed by communication, problem-solving, conflict resolution and quality time implying that as love grows in marriage, so does the sense of fulfillment.

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, marital fulfillment is largely shaped by emotional and relational quality rather than demographic factors like age, education, or length of marriage. Love within marriage is dynamic and culturally shaped, moving beyond romantic ideals into realms of emotional maturity, resilience, and shared growth. It was seen as evolving through shared experiences, deep intimacy, and commitment, affirmed theories such as Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love, the Investment Model, and Maslow's Human Needs Theory.

Effective communication, emotional support, and secure attachment emerged as key contributors to fulfillment, supporting Gottman's theories, Attachment Theory, and Social Support Theory. Moderate communication gaps among some couples highlight the need for interventions like Emotionally Focused Therapy and Transformative mediation.

While shared time was a secondary factor, its positive role confirms Time Investment and Emotional Intimacy Theories. Couples also demonstrated resilience and adaptability, aligning with Development Stage Theory, Crisis Theory, Bandura's Self-Efficacy models, and the IDEAL Problem Solver framework.

Cultural influences were evident, as role-sharing and mutual respect reflected Resource and Social Exchange Theories. In collectivist contexts, love and roles were shaped by family. Champman's Five Love Languages added insights into how love is uniquely expressed and received.

Basically, marital fulfillment is an ongoing, adaptive process rooted in emotional connection, communication, cultural context, and mutual growth, integrating a wide array of psychological and sociocultural theories.

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