

The Love Multiverse

5 Things You Need to Know About Your Love Story That Will Radically Change Your Relationship



Welcome!	3
1. Behind Your Back, Your Love Story Influences Just About Everything in Your Life	4
2. Relationship Issues? You're Creating Your Own Self-Fulfilling Prophecy!	6
3. Your Love Story Determines Feelings, Too	8
4. There's a Formula for Thriving Relationships	10
5. Your Past Doesn't Determine Your Future	13
References	14

Welcome!

I'm so glad you're here!

This eBook gives you a short, but potentially life-changing introduction to my work on love and relationships. Together with my husband, Robert J. Sternberg (a professor of psychology at Cornell University), I've been conducting research on relationships and writing about love for decades.

Your relationships are important to you, and they have a significant impact on your life and well-being. If you have a relationship issue or even just want to make sure that your relationship stays as great as it currently is, you've got no time to waste.

For that reason, you'll get no fluff from me — just research-backed insights and methods that will help you create your best life yet.

It's my honor and passion to help you feel a little happier and more fulfilled every day.

I hope you'll enjoy this eBook. If you have any questions, comments, or ideas, please don't hesitate to get in touch with me at karin@lovetmultiverse.com

I'd love to hear from you!

All my best,

Dr. Karin

1. Behind Your Back, Your Love Story Influences Just About Everything in Your Life

Your love story is a set of ideas, beliefs, and preconceptions about what love should be like. It develops over your lifetime. You observe the relationships of your parents, neighbors, and relatives; you create your own relationships; you learn about relationships in books, on TV or in the movies. Many of the themes of our stories come from your childhood experiences with siblings, parents, and friends. Experiences from your adolescence can play a prominent role as well, and often it is our most painful experiences that get incorporated into our stories.

Over time, you create your very own idea of what love and relationships should be like – your personal love story – and set out to make these stories come true.

Your love story influences your life and your relationship in many different ways. It has an impact on:

- the partner you choose
- how you expect to be treated by your partner
- how you treat your partner
- how you react to conflict
- how you communicate with your partner
- how you wish to spend your time together
- how you envision the roles you and your partner will play
- what your ideal relationship looks like
- your relationship satisfaction
- how you hope your relationship will play out in the long term, and much more.

Linda grew up in a household where her parents held back not only their affection, but also kept her on a short leash with respect to physical goods. If Linda did not behave, she was not allowed to participate in the family dinner. Although her family had the financial means to afford all they needed, Linda had to wear what she considered un-fashionable hand-me-downs from her considerably older siblings and was forced to wear those until they had holes and could not be reused again. Linda has learned that in relationships, you cannot rely on others to fulfill your need. She feels it's best to be independent and always prepared for the worst.

2. Relationship Issues? You're Creating Your Own Self-Fulfilling Prophecy!

Over time, you create your very own idea of what love and relationships should be like – your personal love story – and set out to make these stories come true.

As you have seen above, your love story influences all areas of your relationship; your feelings, your behaviors, your dreams, and aspirations. Your love story encapsulates your very own idea of what love and relationships should be, and thus, you set out to make this story come true in your life.

You search for a partner who, according to your love story, fits into your picture of what a suitable partner should be like: What are your ideal partner's physical attributes, their education and profession, their values, their traits, their goals in life? If you dive deeply into your love story, you will find the answers. But if your love story leads you astray to a kind of person that ultimately isn't good for you, you'll be led astray time and time again.

If conflict is threatening to you because your mother got verbally abusive toward your father during their many arguments and eventually left him to raise you and your siblings as a single father, you may shut down in situations of conflict with your partner. This in turn may have a negative impact on your ability to create a resilient and healthy relationship.

If you expect your relationship to be relatively short-lived, you will act differently and give up on it much more easily than if you expect your relationship to last a lifetime.

These are just a few examples of how your love story directly influences your partner search and relationship.

But there's a big problem: This is all happening unconsciously. People are usually not aware of their love stories. You may end up being a "victim" of your own love story because you re-enact patterns that are not healthy and conducive to a stable and thriving relationship.

Let's return to Linda. As a married adult, Linda has taken up the habit of hoarding all kinds of goods – from food to clothes, to books, and mementos. Not only is her house cluttered, which drives her husband insane, but she also has trouble relying on her husband. She always expects the other shoe to drop and her husband to end the relationship, leaving her with nothing, although nothing points to her husband having the intention of doing so. As a consequence, she and her husband are experiencing frequent conflicts. Her husband is disappointed and discouraged because he feels he has always treated Linda well, and yet Linda does not seem to be able trust him.

The relationship of Don's parents has always been strained. They married at a young age and had children soon thereafter. The atmosphere in the household was hostile. No matter what he said, Don felt like he could never say the right thing. His parents seemed constantly to be upset with their children. They accused him of lying and never advocated for him when he got into trouble in school (which he did a lot, partly because he was relentlessly bullied and at some point decided that if he did not stand up for himself, nobody would). He soon learned that it was best in confrontations to shut down and say nothing at all – up to a point when he would explode because he could not take what he perceived as mistreatment anymore. Don's strategy of shutting down in confrontations until he can't take it anymore has survived into adulthood and his adult relationships. Anything his partner may say he interprets as critical of him as a person, and subsequently Don refuses to engage with his partner. His way of interacting and working out (or rather not working out) confrontations has led to the failure of several relationships. Don is increasingly becoming aware of his unhealthy reactions to conflict, but he doesn't know how to change his deeply engrained feelings and behavior patterns.

3. Your Love Story Determines Feelings, Too

Let's talk about how you want to feel in a happy relationship. Do you want to feel very close to your partner and share with them all details of your life history? Are you fine with a bit more emotional distance, or are there things you'd rather not talk about? Are you looking for the relationship of a lifetime, or are you just in town for a bit and looking for someone to spend your time with? Are you a passionate person or rather down-to-earth?

The way you imagine you'll feel in your perfect relationship has much to do with your love story. It's your love story that shapes your vision of your ideal relationship, and so it also influences what you'd like to feel for your partner (and what you'd like them to feel for you!).

Any relationship is characterized by three different core components of love: intimacy, passion, and commitment:

You can feel **intimacy** with another person in a lot of different ways. For example, you may feel comfortable enough to share your innermost feelings with someone else, even when you are embarrassed about it. Intimacy is also involved when you value a loved one, are able to count on them in times of need, and when you trust them and feel safe with them.

When you think about **passion**, the first thing that comes to mind may be sexual fulfillment. And while that can be a part of passion, other feelings can play a role as well. For example, you may feel that you absolutely could not live without that other person, you may find yourself fantasizing about the person, or you may be excited when you think about the person.

Commitment is not a feeling but rather a decision you make: Do you intend to maintain your relationship and love in the long term? When two people marry, they legalize the commitment to love each other for life. Often, however, partners disagree on what their commitment to each other really means. What constitutes

the end of a relationship? The death of a partner? When one partner becomes permanently disabled and cannot participate in daily life anymore? When partners feel they have nothing in common anymore?

Your happiness depends not only on the absolute amounts of intimacy, passion, and commitment you have in your relationship - it depends more on whether you have what you want to have, and whether your partner is giving you what you need.

Alex recently got divorced after a long and contentious marriage. For now, his priority is to get over what he calls the "trauma" of his marriage, have time to develop his interests, and re-establish his life – this time, according to his own criteria and wishes. A few weeks after his move to a new city, he meets Francesca. Although he had not planned to get involved with anyone anytime soon again, the two hit it off and start dating. After a few months, Francesca tries to take their relationship to the next level. After all, they are no college students anymore. Alex, however, is extremely wary. He is not ready to commit to another relationship at this point. All he wants for now is to have an uncomplicated life with no one to accommodate and with no conflicts constantly lurking on the horizon. Francesca is quite distressed when he tells her; an uncommitted relationship is the last thing she envisioned when she started dating Alex.

4. There's a Formula for Thriving Relationships

There is a formula for happy long-term relationships. It's not a secret, but it is one that is not well known. Here it is:

If you want to have a fulfilled and harmonious long-term relationship, your love story needs to be compatible with that of your partner.

You are both unique individuals with unique stories, so you won't ever find someone whose love story exactly matches yours. And that isn't necessary for a happy relationship either.

Rather, you're looking for a partner who has a love story whose core elements are a good fit to yours.

Sometimes, couples start out having compatible love stories but, over time, their stories change or they develop away from each other. At some point, partners find that their stories are not compatible with each other anymore. Being aware of your love story helps you understand underlying reasons for why things may go wrong in your relationship. It also gives you a deep understanding of what makes your relationship work so that you can connect on an even deeper basis and enrich and deepen your relationship on a continuing basis.

How can you tell if your stories are compatible or not?

To make that judgment requires that you have reflected on your own love story and are, at least to some extent, familiar with your partner's love story. But your day-to-day interactions also provide you with some valuable clues: One main sign of incompatible stories is miscommunication or disagreements on fundamental aspects of your relationship.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you feel you talk with each other but you do not connect?

- Do you talk but your conversations lead nowhere?
- Do you say one thing and your partner hears another?
- Do you have different ways of dealing with conflict?
- Do you differ in your opinions on which roles each of you should play in your relationship?
- Do you have a hard time reaching agreements on important decisions?
- Do your conflicts regularly get out of control?

If you frequently experience one or more of the issues above and it's causing significant friction, your stories may be a mismatch.

But here's the deal: If your stories are not a good match, don't give up quite yet! One or both of you can attempt to change your story to some extent so you can find common ground (again). Changing your love story is not easy, because your love story encapsulates your life experiences and has been in the making for a long time, but it is absolutely possible and has led many couples on the way to creating the deep connection that is the basis of a thriving relationship.

Erica and Philipp have been married for nine years. The first few years of their marriage were very happy ones. Philipp's law practice was very successful, and Erica took care of their young children. Their roles were clearly defined, and although in everyday life there was not much passion or romance in their relationship, they were happy with the way things were.

Over the past few years, however, Erica has become more and more unhappy with their relationship. Erica has changed a lot. She has become a very spiritual person, and she has developed an interest in advocacy work for children affected by poverty. Philipp, she feels, has stagnated. He is not interested in developing any interests on his own or working toward a juster world. Erica feels like they do not have anything in common anymore, and thus, there is not much for them to talk about when they're both at home – except organizational things regarding their daily life with their children.

Erica's and Philipp's love stories have diverged significantly over the past years. The question is whether they will recognize that their unhappiness is due to their slowly diverging love stories, and if they can find a way to bring them back together and create a love story that appeals to and fulfills them both.

5. Your Past Doesn't Determine Your Future

Perhaps you belong to the ranks of people who have a rather checkered relationship history. Maybe you always end up with partners who are not good for you, maybe relationship failures have become something you're much too accustomed to, or maybe you're still in the relationship you thought in the past would be *the one*, but things haven't been going well for a while now. Perhaps, given all your experience, you think you're doomed. Maybe you think you're not able to find a partner who is truly compatible with you. Possibly you don't even feel you're deserving of love. Or maybe you feel you're just not the kind of person who can make a relationship work.

Don't despair. Whatever negative sentiments you have, they're not true. You are worthy of love, and you can create a loving relationship that fulfills you and lets you and your partner be your best selves. I've seen it many times in my work — there are no hopeless cases!

More often than not, relationship issues are rooted in your love story. And while your love story is a part of you and represents both your history and you as a person, there are ways to make your love story conscious and to adapt or change it in order to help you create the relationship you have always dreamed of. You may opt to work on your love story alone, or to explore it together with your partner so you can create your own joint love story that serves as a roadmap for your future.

Is changing or adapting your love story easy? No, it isn't always easy, just as changing habits is not easy. But it's doable. And it's one of the most worthwhile things you can do because it creates the basis for your future.

Let your future begin now.

References

- Sorokowski, P., Sorokowska, A., Karwowski, M., Groyecka, A., Aavik, T., Akello, G., Alm, C., Amjad, N., Anjum, A., & Asao, K. (2021). *Universality of the triangular theory of love: Adaptation and psychometric properties of the triangular love scale in 25 countries*. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 58(1), 106–115.
- Madey, S. F., & Rodgers, L. (2009). *The Effect of Attachment and Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love on Relationship Satisfaction*. *Individual Differences Research*, 7(2), 76–84.
- Sternberg, R. J. & Sternberg, K. *A RELIC Theory of Love: The Role of Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, and Extrapersonal Elements in Love*. Manuscript in preparation.
- Sternberg, R. J., & Sternberg, K. (Eds.) (2019). *The new psychology of love* (2nd ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Sternberg, K. (2013). *Psychology of Love 101*. New York: Springer.