

## The Relevance of Triangular Theory of Love in Devon Daniels' *Meet You in the Middle*

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the profound love shared between the main characters, Kate Adam and Ben Mackenzie, in the novel "*Meet You in the Middle*" by Devon Daniels drawing from Robert J. Sternberg's concept of Triangular Theory of Love. The study aims to understand the realization that is underlying components of love by contributing through the triangular theory of love in their relationship. The researchers employ qualitative approach, focusing on the contexts and subjective interpretations. The analysis uncovers that Kate Adam and Ben Mackenzie attain triangular theory of love by embodying the fundamental components of intimacy, passion, and commitment within their relationship.

**Keywords:** *Ben Mackenzie; Devon Daniels; Kate Adam; Meet You in the Middle; Triangular Theory of Love*

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## INTRODUCTION

Love serves as a crucial expression of human emotions, indicating a fundamental need for connection and the cultivation of meaningful relationships. This need for both giving and receiving love is deeply intertwined with the psychological aspects of human nature. Despite its profound importance, love is sometimes overlooked, yet it remains an essential psychological and physiological requirement for human well-being (Stallard & Jobe, 2018). Love, being a multidimensional phenomenon, encompasses emotions, cognition, motivation, and action, playing a significant role in human survival on a daily basis (Stallard & Jobe, 2018). However, many individuals lack a comprehensive understanding of the complexity of love and tend to perceive it as a singular concept. They often ponder why some love lasts while others disappeared rapidly, leading to the misconception that love is commonplace and devoid of deeper meaning (Sternberg, 1986). This limited perspective overlooks the various components essential for nurturing fulfilling relationships. Moreover, in philosophical discourse, love serves as a subject of inquiry concerning its inherent nature, diverse manifestations, and underlying functions.

Robert Sternberg, an American psychologist renowned for his work on love, intelligence, and creativity, introduced the Triangular Theory of Love to clarify the dynamics of interpersonal relationships (Sternberg, 1986). According to Sternberg, love can be dissected into three components that intertwine to form the vertices of a triangle when combined. The vertices of the triangular model begin with intimacy at the top, passion on the left, and commitment on the right (Sternberg, 1986). Each term holds nuanced meanings within the context of relationships. Firstly, intimacy encompasses feelings of closeness, connection, and bonding, fostering warmth and emotional depth in loving relationships. It facilitates a sense of connectedness and closeness between

individuals. Not only that, intimacy is not only about having a feeling of warm in loving relationship, but also about having other feelings, such as (a) desire to promote the welfare of the loved one (b) experienced happiness with the loved ones, that brings a deep emotional bond, understanding, and comfort, (c) high regard for the loved ones, in a loving relationship by showing the gratitude feeling, (d) being able to count the loved one in times of need, (e) mutual understanding with the loved one, (f) sharing of one's self and one's possessions with the loved one, (g) receipt of emotional support from the loved one, (h) giving of emotional support to the loved one, (i) intimate communication with the loved one means sharing their innermost thoughts, feelings, and experiences with each other. This communication goes beyond words and involves understanding, empathizing, and forming a strong bond with the loved one. (j) valuing the loved one in one's life is like a process of nurturing, cherishing, and appreciating the loved ones (Sternberg, 1986; Welch, 2023).

Secondly, passion entails the desire for romance, physical attraction, and sexual fulfillment, serving as a motivating force for arousal within the relationship. It is the driving force behind romantic and sexual experiences. Physical appearance is often the first thing that attracts someone to another person when they fall in love for the first time. This attraction can then develop into a deeper and more intimate connection (Novera, 2017). On the other hand, for related phenomena in love relationships can include to; a) physical attraction, which is usually shown in the early stages of passionate love, b) romance, which involves expressing love in a more bodily way such as kissing, hugging, and other kinds of physical closeness, c) sexual desire, which creates a strong urge to have a sexual relationship with the other person, d) infatuation, which describes a feeling of lust and physical passion without having commitment and affection for the person (Feuermen, 2023). Moreover, there are other needs besides sexual needs that may be important in the experience of passion, such as: first, self-esteem in passion means having courage, resilience, and confident direction. Second, succorance in passion means giving guidance, support, and comfort. Third, nurturance in passion means being warm and encouraging growth. Fourth, affiliation in passion means feeling connected and belonging to one's partners. Fifth, dominance in passion means having intensity or motivation in a loving relationship, as long as it shows a deep emotional connection and attraction in possessiveness or control. Sixth, submission, and seventh, self-actualization means reaching one's potential within the relationship, which includes self-discovery (Sternberg, 1986). The importance of different variations of these needs depends on the people, situations, and the kind of love relationship they have. For instance, sexual satisfaction is likely a strong need in romantic relationships. These needs can be expressed through psychological arousal and physiological arousal. These two types of arousal are interrelated, because they will surely influence each other. The main idea is that intimacy and passion, the two parts of love, will always affect each other in some way in close relationships, depending on the person and the context (Sternberg, 1986).

Lastly, commitment pertains to the short-term and long-term aspects of the relationship, involving cognitive elements in decision-making and the maintenance of

love over time. It involves a willingness to invest in and nurture the relationship for its longevity and stability (Sternberg, 1986). A person may choose to end a relationship in the short term because they love someone else, but in the long term they are dedicated to keeping their love relationship (Sternberg, 1986). This commitment involves thinking about whether they want to stay committed and have a lasting love relationship. To have a lasting love relationship, they need to support each other's growth, potential, and future. They also need to decide to remain in the relationship, overcome difficulties together, and keep working on improving the relationship (Bloom, 2017). The decision to commit to someone logically and temporarily often leads to marriage, which is a legal way of affirming the choice to love each other for life. The decision/commitment aspect of love should not be overlooked just because it lacks the excitement or intensity that the intimacy and passion aspects of love have. In any love relationship, there will be good and bad times, and that is when the decision/commitment aspect can sustain the relationship and help it survive (Sternberg, 1986). The decision/commitment aspect is very important to cope with the hard times and to enjoy the good times as a couple (Sternberg, 1986).

If a relationship neglects or separates love or one of its aspects, the person will feel unhappy and isolated even if they are in a committed relationship, especially if they do not have the special intimacy aspect with their partner (Sternberg, 1986). The intimacy and passion aspects are related and interact with the decision/commitment aspect. According to many people in Sternberg's studies, this is because the emotional and other aspects of intimacy or the motivational and other aspects of passion alone cannot produce the love that each person wants (Sternberg, 1986). The commitment element of love can develop from the intimate or passionate involvement, as seen in arranged marriages or relationships where one does not choose their partner. As the intimacy grows, so does the passion and the commitment. However, the decision/commitment element does not always depend on the arousal, but can also influence it. In other words, the decisional factor can regulate the other factors of the relationship (Sternberg, 1986). Moreover, in any close relationship such as with family members, they have a close bond and realize that any intimacy and passion in this kind of relationship comes from cognitive commitment rather than the opposite that a couple would experience. In summary, the three elements are all vital for loving relationships, but their significance varies from one relationship to another. Thus, the importance of these elements of love can change over time within a relationship and across different relationships at the same time.

The Triangle Theory of Love describes eight different types of love, each characterized by different combinations of its three components (Sternberg, 1986). Firstly, non-love lacks all three components, while liking is defined solely by intimacy. Infatuated love is driven by passion alone, and empty love is marked only by commitment. Subsequently, romantic love combines intimacy and passion, whereas companionate love combines intimacy and commitment. Fatuous love entails both passion and commitment, and consummate love embodies all three components: intimacy, passion, and commitment (Sternberg, 1986). In essence, the components of

intimacy originate from emotional investment, passion arises from motivational involvement, and commitment results from cognitive decision making in the relationship (Sternberg, 1986).

Triangular Theory of Love does not only exist in real life, but also exist in literature works. In literary works, the significance of love is undeniable, as it evokes powerful emotions that shape the relationships depicted among characters, whether with God, family, friends, partners, or others. Love in literature draws readers into the narrative, enhancing their engagement and interest in the storyline (Story, 2023). Literary works offer readers the opportunity to comprehend, appreciate, and grasp the meaning behind each element, be it in novels, dramas, or poems. Hence, for this study, the researchers choose novels as the focal point. Novels, being fictional prose, offer extensive narratives that delve into human experiences and stories.

In this study, the researchers have selected the novel of *Meet You in the Middle* by Devon Daniels, which was released on February 2, 2021. This novel is available in both print and Google Books formats. It falls under the genre of romantic comedy with the political humor (Daniels, 2021). Then, the researchers intend to explore the concept of Triangular Theory of Love within the context of *Meet You in the Middle* by Devon Daniels, identifies intimacy, passion, and commitment as the three components of love in relationship. By analyzing how these components manifest in the relationship between the characters Ben Mackenzie and Kate Adam.

The novel of *Meet You in the Middle* is about the romance between Kate Adam and Ben Mackenzie, who work for opposing senators in Washington DC. They start off as enemies, clashing over their political views and personalities. Kate thinks Ben is rude and arrogant, while Ben thinks Kate is judgmental and annoying. They secretly admire each other's looks, especially Ben's green eyes that Kate adores so much. Then, Ben begins to send Kate letters with his opinions on various social issues, hoping to challenge her perspective. Kate responds with her own letters, and they develop a correspondence that gradually turns into a friendship. They realize they have more in common than they thought, and they start to flirt with each other. Kate feels conflicted about her attraction to Ben, who is her rival. Ben shows his caring side to Kate, who is surprised by his depth. They both discover new aspects of each other, and Kate faces her biggest fear of falling in love with her enemy, Ben.

Additionally, the reason why the researchers want to choose this book and theory as analysis because the researchers find love is a complicated and multifaceted feeling that has been the topic of much discussion and debate throughout history. It is hard to establish the views of the whole generation, but some people believe that love has become "cheesy" in this today's society because of various reasons. For instance, an Elite Daily article claims that modern culture has focused on instant gratification and has led to a lack of patience and commitment in relationships, which can make love seem less significant (Hudson, 2015). Therefore, the researchers use the Triangular Theory of Love to help the current generation understand the components of love (intimacy, passion, and commitment) as a way to create the kinds of relationships that they want.

## METHOD

This study uses qualitative approach to examine certain concepts and written data address the research question. It describes how the *Meet You in the Middle* novel relates to the notion of Triangular Theory of Love, using literary study perspective. The data for analysis is obtained by closely reading the whole content of novel and reading the dialogues between Kate Adam and Ben Mackenzie, contrasting it with ideas about the component love of intimacy, passion, and commitment situation between them by studying the dialogues and written texts, citing them in the study, and listing the primary and secondary sources used for analysis.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The focus of the findings and discussion here is to analyze the novel *Meet You in the Middle* by Devon Daniels. The researchers aim to address the component love that consists in the both of main characters, Kate Adam and Ben Mackenzie by showing evidence of Triangular Theory of Love's components; intimacy, passion, and commitment through the conversations and narrations of Kate Adam and Ben Mackenzie in the novel. Then, the researchers inspect the realization of Triangular Theory of Love in the following texts bellow:

### 1. Kate Adam and Ben Mackenzie's relationship enclosed by Intimacy

#### Data 1

*He was awful at first. But he apologized, and I accepted it.* (Chapter 9, Page 76)

Tessa, who is Kate's friend, questions Kate's decision to spend time with Ben, who treated her poorly before (Daniels, 2021). However, Kate believes that Ben has changed for the better. The quote above shows how Kate and Ben have a mutual understanding in the intimacy aspect (Sternberg, 1986). As Ben says sorry to Kate for his mistakes and values their relationship more than his pride (Smith, 2023). Kate also accepts his apology and lets go of his past wrongdoings is proven how they both have a mutual understanding to each other (Daniels, 2021).

#### Data 2

*I thought I'd be relieved when he left, but as I stare at the closed door, I feel even more bereft than before he showed up* (Chapter 10, Page 89)

Kate makes up a lie about meeting her friends when Ben asks her about her plans after turning him down (Daniels, 2021). She does this to show Ben that he is not a friend to her and she has no interest in him. However, she regrets her decision and feels even more unhappy than before (Daniels, 2021). The quote also suggests that they have reached a level of intimacy where they value each other's presence. The quote above indicates of experienced happiness with the loved ones in the intimacy component, which is related to one of the main factors that is joy of existence (Sternberg, 1986; Dorbin, 2012). Joy of existence refers to how happiness can be experienced in the simple moment of being alive, either by oneself or with the person they love (Dorbin, 2012). When Ben goes away, Kate is in a lonely situation or state, then she admits to herself she is not feeling better, she feels emptier. So, this implies that Kate is happy when Ben is around.

## 2. Kate Adam and Ben Mackenzie's relationship enclosed by Passion

### Data 1

*This is my new favorite place, right here.* (Chapter 24, Page 254)

Kate's new preferred spot is the firm and tense back of Ben (Daniels, 2021). They are currently in a tricky situation, as they are walking along the corridor of their workplace and heading towards the lift. But Kate is puzzled by the lift that is near Ben's office. Then a woman emerges from the room, and Ben drags Kate to the ladies' restroom by holding her tight and Kate declares that Ben's powerful muscles are her best place (Daniels, 2021). The quote explains of succorance, which means looking for help, support or relief, is part of the passion element of consummate love (Sternberg, 1986). In psychology, succorance is related to comfort, which is when someone feel less worried, upset, or scared (Cherry, 2023). Ben and Kate show succorance and comfort when she says she likes his muscle, when they hide in the ladies' restroom.

### Data 2

*"I closed my blinds so I wouldn't have to watch my girlfriend eat a cozy lunch with a guy who wants to get into her pants." My face must do something funny because he bites out, "I'm sorry I meant my secret girlfriend."* (Chapter 27, Page 284)

Ben confesses his envy when John shows up at her place with a meal for her, and they share it (Daniels, 2021). This makes them have to dine together. According to the quote, dominance is a feature of the passion component (Sternberg, 1986). This means that in a relationship, one person tends to be more active or assertive in showing their emotions and desires, like Ben does with Kate, he is usually the first one to reveal his jealousy for Kate (Myers, 2023). When two people have a strong connection and attraction, their relationship can be more fulfilling and meaningful (Feuermen, 2023). But this also means that they can be more prone to jealousy, especially if they feel that their relationship is in danger. Jealousy is a complex emotion that can include fear, insecurity, and anxiety, and it can arise when this connection or attraction is threatened (Goldie, 2022). It can be triggered by the impression of a possible rival or by doubts about a partner's feelings which is why Ben feels that way when he sees Kate with John.

### Data 3

*Mine.* (Chapter 30, Page 330)

Following their passionate encounter, Ben tells Kate that the making love that they do is worth the wait and he is being concerned of Kate's condition after they did the activity (Daniels, 2021). Kate asks Ben for his opinion on her appearance and he chuckles at her response. He hugs her closer and declares that she belongs to her (Daniels, 2021). The quote above indicates affiliation in the passion component (Sternberg, 1986). Affiliation in passion component refers to the feeling of attachment to one's partners. When someone calls their partner 'mine', it usually means they have a strong desire to them. This desire involves both feelings and physical elements, indicating a deep and intense romantic feeling (Feuermen, 2023). The expression of 'mine' can be related to physical attraction that Kate provokes by asking him 'what does she look good or not' after they have sex, as people usually want to be close to

someone they find appealing (Feuermen, 2023). This is how Ben sees Kate. She is attractive, and Ben cannot resist her anymore. So he only shows his love by saying she is his.

### 3. Kate Adam and Ben Mackenzie's relationship enclosed by Commitment

#### Data 1

*His eyes are locked on mine "All the time. When I'm with you, when I'm without you. Since the day we met I've thought of almost nothing else. I pretend I don't. That's the killer, you know. The pretending. Pretending I don't have feelings for you, pretending that being friends is enough. I've gotten really good at pretending. But goddamn, I'm so tired of it, Kate. Every minute I'm with you that I don't tell you feel like one step closer to insanity"* (Chapter 22, Page 231)

Ben questions Kate's level of interest in him and compares it to his own. Kate replies that she cannot answer that without knowing how often he thinks of her. Ben then reveals his true emotions and admits that he has been hiding them for a long time and that he cannot bear to lose Kate (Daniels, 2021). The quote explains how the involvement of cognitive elements in fostering potential that aims for a lasting relationship (Sternberg, 1986). Fostering potential means finding and nurturing the hidden or unused possibilities within the relationship (English.stackexchange.com, 2018). It also means creating an environment that supports the exploration and improvement of new skills, interests, or aspects of the relationship. Fostering potential is more about planning ahead and getting ready for the future progress (English.stackexchange.com, 2018). This is clearly shown by how Ben hides his feelings at first by acting like he does not like Kate, until he finally admits his feelings to Kate. Ben's admission shows how he is eager for their new situation and ready for future growth after his confession.

#### Data 2

*You know, I'm pretty sure I fell in love with you the night you carried me home.* (Chapter 30, Page 317)

Kate tells and confesses to Ben how she fell for him during their intimate moment. The intimate moment she refers is the night when she was drunk and he stayed over at her place. Kate made a bold move and leaned in towards Ben with passion. She ran her fingers over his shoulders and his hair, and they were about to kiss (Daniels, 2021). The moment brings Kate to have both intimacy and passion, which are two elements of love that depend on how emotionally connected they are (Sternberg, 1986). Their intimacy and passion are not just about physical attraction or even arousal activity. But also about having common values, respect, communication, and problem-solving skills. These factors are important for creating and maintaining a strong bond in their relationship (Guarnaccia, 2023).

In this case, Kate's actions at that time did show how passionate some of their activities were, referring to physical attraction which made Kate amazed by the

handsomeness of Ben, who was sleeping quite close to her when Kate was drunk and woke up from being unconscious. Subconsciously, she stroked Ben's hair at a fairly close distance at that time. However, when Kate expresses her feelings in the present, her actions clearly show how their intimacy and passion components are focused on the communication they build. Kate's current communication with Ben shows how she is open and honest about her experiences, understanding and feelings towards Ben. Then, he consciously shows his admiration for Ben by communicating his love and affection through non-verbal actions, such as the gestures Kate makes towards Ben (Markway, 2016). Where she brought her fingers to Ben's shoulders, hair, and almost kissed each other. Furthermore, in the present, Kate expresses her feelings for Ben by holding hands with Ben as well (Daniels, 2021).

### **Data 3**

*It's been nearly a year since Kate and I made things official, professionally, it's been a year of victories – for both of us. (Epilogue/P.342)*

Kate and Ben have been dating for almost a year and their relationship is remarkably peaceful and harmonious (Daniels, 2021). Kate has accomplished many things and Ben has always been there to back her up. The quote shows a long-term aspect in the commitment component (Sternberg, 1986). Kate and Ben's one-year relationship shows their dedication, as their behavior indicates that they have chosen to keep their bond strong for a long period. Commitment component in a long-term relationship means having a strong sense of loyalty and steadiness (Lierley, 2021). It involves feelings that motivate a person to stick with their partner and pursue shared goals (Feuermen, 2023). This readiness at a certain point is associated with higher levels of investment, satisfaction, and commitment in the relationship over time (Hadden & Agnew, 2020). Therefore, how did their relationship progress in a year.

### **Data 4**

*“Oh my god,” she whispers. “I get to marry you.” So this is what it feels like to get everything you've ever wanted. “You mean you get to argue with me for the rest of our lives.” She smiles at me. “Promise?” (Epilogue/P.345)*

In the end of the story describes how Kate and Ben reach the climax of their love story when Ben pops the question to Kate. He chooses her as his life partner, showing his dedication to her. As he proposes, their intimacy grows, their passion or desire is expressed through a kiss when Ben does the propose, and their loyalty is established (Sternberg, 1986). They have taken their relationship to the highest level of intimacy as a married couple (Daniels, 2021).

## **CONCLUSION**

The novel *Meet You in the Middle* explores the concept of Triangular Theory of Love through the story of Kate Adam and Ben Mackenzie, two opposing political staffers. Kate is a passionate and ambitious liberal who works for a senator pushing for a major bill. Ben is a conservative and formidable aide to another influential senator



who opposes the bill. They start off as enemies who constantly clash, but gradually develop a mutual attraction. Their relationship faces many challenges and doubts from their colleagues, who think that a Democrat and a Republican can never be together. However, Kate and Ben manage to overcome the difficulties and show that their love is possible and strong.

As the story progress, Kate and Ben's animosity fades away and they develop a relationship that surpasses their expectations. Ben initiates the reconciliation by apologizing to Kate for his rude behavior. They gradually grow closer and establish a deeper connection that strengthens their relationship. This connection is based on the pillars of trust, understanding, and mutual respect. Kate and Ben share their feelings, fears, and dreams with each other, by creating a stronger bond. This action between Kate and Ben shows of Intimacy component in Triangular Theory of Love for a healthy relationship between them.

Moreover, Kate and Ben are drawn to each other's physical features and enjoy sexual intimacy which helps them sustain their relationship and feel romantic through the Passion component that happening in their relationship. On the other hand, they also want to reach the love that they desire and deserve by deciding to commit a long-term relationship at the end of the story. In conclusion, Kate and Ben's story shows that love can transcend political differences and that a successful relationship requires the presence and balance of intimacy, passion, and commitment.

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