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The Romeo and Juliet Effect on Love Feelings

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Modern young men and women seem to be free in their choice of who they love. Nevertheless, other people in their life, their social networks, and family members appear to significantly affect their romantic choice. Researchers have extensively studied the Romeo and Juliet Effect on romantic love (Driscoll et al., 1972).

Are People Free in their Choice of Partners?

People in modern societies think that their choice of a partner for a relationship is their own. They believe that they are free to choose and owe no one anything. Is this the case? And what happens when other people, like relatives or friends, interfere with this freedom?

How free are people in their love preferences? How are they influenced by the people around them? When choosing romantic or life-long

partners, should children listen to, or should they listen to the opinion of their parents?

Those who believe in romantic love think that parental interference in their children's romantic relationships destroys love. Or maybe it does the opposite? May be this interference rekindles the fire of love? Let's think of Romeo and Juliet. How ardently they loved, despite the opposition of their relatives, the Montagues and Capulets! Is there any scientific and empirical evidence for this?

What Did Early Studies Show About Parental Interference in Their Children's Love?

A survey of 140 romantic couples that researchers conducted in 1972 showed that parental interference in their children's love affairs only intensifies romantic feelings between the partners and makes them want to continue the relationship.

Researchers called this phenomenon the "Romeo and Juliet effect" and explained it by the fact that when young people are forced to engage in certain behaviors, they resist and often show increased interest in the behaviors that are attempted to be restricted. In other words, the forbidden fruit is sweet.

Does the Romeo and Juliet Effect Really Work?

For many years after this study, researchers referred to the Romeo and Juliet effect as fact. However, subsequent scientific works did not give similar results (Felmlee, 2001; Parks et al., 1983; Sprecher, 2011).

Specifically, a longitudinal study that spanned two years examined relationship dynamics in 101 love couples of young adults from an American university (Sprecher & Felmlee, 1992).

The authors focused on how support from significant others influences young men's and women's feelings. The results showed that expected support from one's own family and friends had a significant impact on relationship quality, more so than expected support from a partner's family and friends. Support from friends, who in the twentieth century arguably fulfill the role of parents in many ways, is particularly important in the development of romantic relationships.

However, this survey did not confirm the Romeo and Juliet effect. Many other studies have also found a rather reverse social environment effect (Felmlee, 2001), in which disapproval of the social environment – parents and friends – leads to a deterioration in the quality of romantic relationships (Sinclair et al., 2015).

Research has revealed a more complex system of social environment influences than previously thought.

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