

Corpse Bride: Victor and Victoria

1. What drew these two together? What was the attraction? Remember, apply research and theory in answering this and the following questions.

Victor Van Dort and Victoria Everglot lived in a time and in a culture in which marriages were often arranged by their families. This was their case and until the day of their formal engagement, they had never met. Neither resisted the arrangement but accepted it as part of their duty to their families. In this regard they revealed an attitude associated with a collectivist society. In this type of society family members are expected to accept the expectations and decisions made by the family regarding their lives and their futures.

Despite the expectation, Victoria and Victor seem to be drawn to each other from their first meeting. Elements of homophily were present in terms of their social status (age, religion, ethnicity and possibly education). Although Victoria came from a noble family (penniless to be sure) and Victor from a bourgeois, new money family (fish merchants), they appear to have similar values and would be expected to move in common social circles.

There seem to be a lot of agreement, expressed both non verbally and verbally, that give each positive reinforcement from the other. We can see that Donn Byrne's law of attraction applied to these two. They almost instantly formed what John Turner called a social group which he defined "as two or more individuals who share a common social identification of themselves or, which is nearly the same thing, perceive themselves to be members of the same social category." In their case, they were two young, rather insecure, shy people who are dominated by their parents and who tended to make a lot of mistakes because of their

insecurities. Both are rather inexperienced in terms of the world. Both like music.

2. What role do you think sexual attraction played in their relationship? Was there a difference for each partner?

Victoria and Victor live in a traditional (and apparently sexually repressed) society where sex is not addressed openly (at least not outside of marriage and from the looks of things not really addressed once married). The two would be expected not to engage in any sexual activity until after they were wed. Evolutionary psychologists would nonetheless say that sex was a factor in their mutual attraction and each possesses qualities that would be desirable to the other gender. For example, Victoria is young, well groomed, nourished, and has features (breasts, hips, prominent cheek bones) that reveal that she is sexually mature, healthy, and capable of bearing children. Cunningham's Multiple Fitness Model would predict that Victor's perception of her face and body reflect biological evolution, socio-cultural forces, individual personality and motivational dynamics in his evaluation of her sexual appeal. He would not necessarily be conscious that she has reproductive value but he would be hard wired to respond positively to features that reveal this. (We can contrast Victoria with Emily who is obviously unable to bear children and is in miserable physical condition—to say the least. There is hardly any question why Victor tries to run away from her.)

Victor himself is also sexually attractive from an evolutionary point of view. His physical features (including his thick eye brows, strong chin, slender but muscular build) reveal that he is sexually mature and in good health. He appears sincere, willing to make lasting commitments and has material resources—qualities from a social-biological standpoint that reflect resources desirable to the other sex. Like Victoria, he possesses a combination of neonatal and sexual maturity features that also makes him physically attractive.

3. How does the couple respond to dilemmas and external factors that impact their relationship? What factors put a strain on the relationship?

Hardly before it begins the relationship is strained by Victor's bumbling and anxious behavior which turns off Victoria's parents, who are already unhappy with the prospect of their daughter marrying a common bourgeois. In a collectivist society, the family's disapproval of one's future spouse can cause the end of the relationship. The strain between Victor and Victoria's family climaxes when the parents learn that he has been involved with another woman, Emily. They terminate the marriage arrangement. Granted, Victor does not want to have anything to do with Emily, but because of unusual circumstances, he had accidentally married her and she won't go away.

Victor sneaks around Victoria's parents to tell her that although he has known her for only a short time, he desires to marry her. She in turn expresses her love for him. Even after he confesses that he's married to Emily, Victoria is not turned off. Realizing the dilemma he's in, she stands by him which upsets her parents who respond by locking her in her room. Her actions as well as Victor's reveal that they have what Sternberg labeled Companionate Love, which combines intimacy and decision/commitment but lacks passion, the drives that lead to romance, physical attraction, and sexual consummation. The strength of the decision/commitment component is revealed in the efforts both make to annul Victor's marriage to Emily.

Victoria's efforts are quickly throttled by her parents who arrange for her to marry Lord Barkis Bittern. Despite her love for Victor, she does not resist, given the culture and her personality, which appears rather passive. Victor soon learns of the arrangement with Lord Bittern. Resigning himself to what he believes is the end of his relationship with Victoria, he agrees to finish the marriage process with Emily. Neither has fallen out of love with the other.

Rather they each agree to their respective marriage arrangements as the honorable thing to do. This is especially true for Victor, who, while he has developed a level of affection for Emily, still loves Victoria.

When all seems to be lost for Victor and Victoria's relationship, things take an abrupt turn with Emily withdrawing her claim on Victor and Lord Bittern accidentally poisoning himself to his death. At the end of the film it appears likely that Victoria's parents will no longer resist the union and the two will finally marry.

4. What is the arc of the relationship? That is, what is the course of the relationship and how did the relationship evolve and change from the beginning to the end?

Victor and Victoria's relationship started off with each resigned to marrying someone they had never met. Thus, there was no initial flirting, casual dating, or involvement of any kind that would have proceeded serious dating and a decision to marry. Their initial contact, certainly awkward given how nervous they each were, created an initial bond. They discovered that they actually liked each other. In terms of Altman and Taylor's Social Penetration Theory they skipped the Orientation and Exploratory Affect Exchange stages and engage in Formal Affect Exchange. At their first meeting, Victoria confided in Victor that "since I was a child I dreamt of my wedding day. I always hoped to find someone I was deeply in love with. Someone to spend the rest of my days with." One gets the sense that she is telling Victor that he is such a man.

That evening, after he had accidentally married Emily, Victor tells Victoria: "I confess. This morning I was terrified of marriage. But then on meeting you I felt that I should be with you always and our wedding could not come soon enough."

The struggle the two had to endure in overcoming the obstacles to their marrying seem to

have strengthened, rather than weakened, their attachment to each other. If nothing else, using Thibaut and Kelley's Evaluation model, Victoria and Victor believed that the potential for their relationship, when compared to their parents' and others' relationships, exceeds what they would consider common in terms of benefits/costs ratio. Compared to the alternatives (Lord Bittern and Emily), they cannot have a better arrangement than the one they have with each other.

At the end of the film, Victoria and Victor are free to marry. Given the relatively short time that they have known each other not much has really changed. However, one gets the sense that a passion is developing between the two transforming their love from Companionate to Consummate.