

CAN MONEY BUY YOU LOVE?

By Tom W. Smith

In its 1993 Valentine's Day issue, *Time* reported that while 72% of Americans say they are "in love," only 59% of those with incomes under \$20,000 are "in love," while 85% with incomes over \$50,000 are "in love".¹ This substantial relationship is surprising given that folk and popular wisdom posits a lack of a relationship between love and money. After all, didn't The Beatles assure us that "money can't buy me love"?

Social scientists have spent less time than bards thinking about the relationship between love and money, but have examined the connection between income and psychological well-being. They have found at best modest relations between higher incomes and either broad measures of psychological well-being, such as life satisfaction and general happiness, or specific measures relating to marital happiness, satisfaction, and harmony.

Several studies have found that income is related to various measures of general psychological well-being (e.g., self-reported happiness, "affect balance" score, overall satisfaction).² These associations hold up with various controls (age, education, and gender). These studies disagree, however, on the strength and importance of the relationship between income and well-being. Veroff, Douvan, and Kulka describe the association as "consistent and strong" and note that "having economic security and affluence are critical aspects of high morale in practically all dimensions of self-appraisal."³ Campbell, Converse and Rodgers, however, describe the association as "so weak in magnitude and irregular in their form that it is best to disregard them...."⁴

Studies of married people show mixed results on the relationship of income to marital happiness and satisfaction. Some researchers have found marital assessments more positive among those with higher incomes.⁵ Others, though, report no association between income and marital well-being.⁶

Given these mixed verdicts, why does the *Time* survey find such a strong association between income and love?

The 1993 *Time* survey was not avail-

able to me for analysis, but the love question was asked on two 1992 surveys that were available. The first, a Yankelovich Clancy Shulman survey, was conducted for *Time* magazine and the Cable News Network in January 1992. This is referred to as the *Time/CNN* survey. The second, a Gallup News Service survey, was conducted in February 1992. It is referred to as the Gallup survey.

The *Time/CNN* and Gallup surveys both show a strong relationship between income and being in love. The *Time/CNN* survey found that 59% of those making less than \$20,000 reported being in love, while for those making \$50,000 and over the percentage was 83. The Gallup survey found that 34% of those making less than \$10,000 reported being in love, while 88% of those making over \$75,000 felt this way. The 1992 *Time/CNN* survey closely duplicates the 1993 *Time* results cited above. The Gallup survey shows a similar pattern. Its finer-grain income categories further indicate that the proportion in love continues to decline as income falls below \$20,000 a year, but levels off above \$50,000. The relationship presented in *Time's* Valentine's Day issue was substantiated and even strengthened by analysis of similar surveys.

I thought, though, that this strong, bivariate relationship might be misleading and that the apparent association might be largely spurious. I looked for variables that were related to both income and being in love and came up with the following explanation for the love and money association:

1. Since income measures total family (*Time/CNN*) or household (Gallup) income, income goes up with number of earners.

2. Married people are more likely to live in families/households with more earners (typically dual-earner couples) than unmarried people are.

3. Married people are more likely to be in love than unmarried people.

Hence, marital status could explain most

of the relationship between love and money.

Figure 1 shows the relationship of income to love, controlling for marital status. Among the non-married no statistically significant relationship exists between household income and being in love. What relationship remains indicates that those from low-income households are less likely to be in love. However, much of this remaining relationship probably reflects cohabitation. Like the married, cohabitators are probably more likely to be in love than the non-married non-cohabitators are, and more likely to have higher household incomes because of the possibility of having both partners being wage earners.

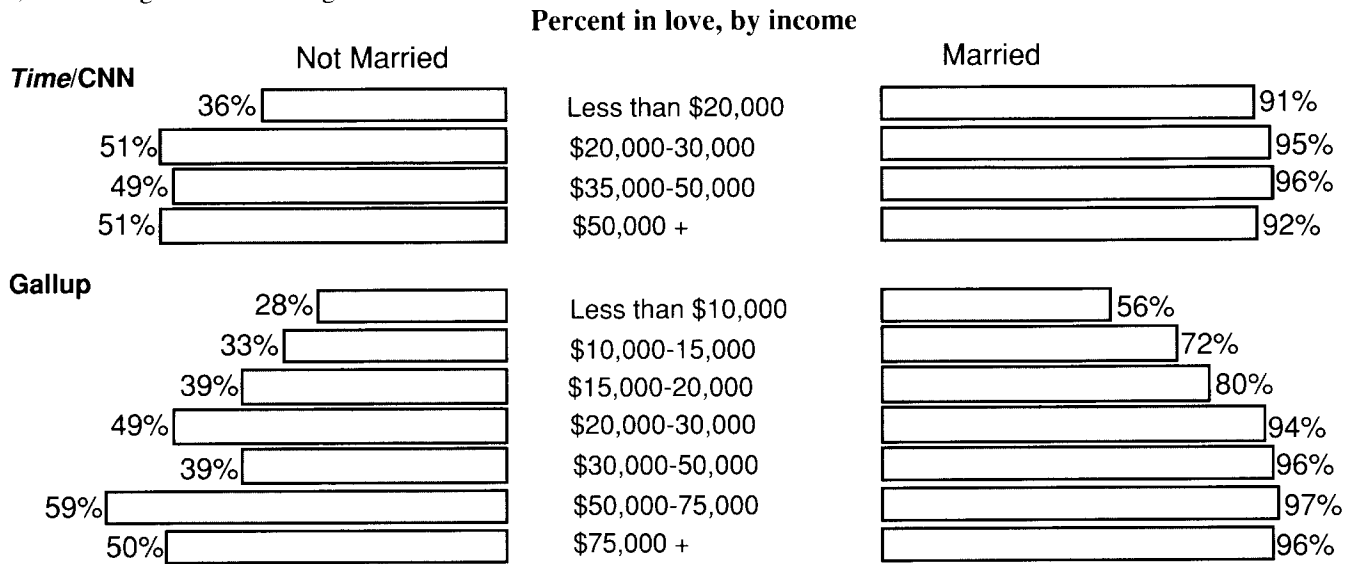
For the married the situation is more complex. The *Time/CNN* survey shows no relationship between income and love. The Gallup survey shows no relationship for income levels above \$20,000, but still shows a moderately strong relationship overall. The percentage in love rises from 56% for those with incomes under \$10,000 to 96% for those with incomes over \$20,000.

When advanced statistical analyses are performed on the data, marital status is by far the strongest predictor of being in love. *Time/CNN* and Gallup data also agree that younger adults are more likely to be in love, and that education is unrelated to being in love. *Time/CNN* finds that non-blacks are slightly more likely to be in love and that income is unrelated to being in love.⁷ Income, however, is a significant predictor taking into consideration marital status, age, education, economic change, and race in the Gallup survey. In a similar analysis of married people only, the Gallup survey finds those in love tend to have higher incomes, more education, and to be younger.⁸

The strong relationship between love and income suggested by *Time's* Valentine's Day issue is misleading. In the *Time/CNN* survey the association is entirely explained by marital status. Gallup data do suggest that being in love may be related to more income at least among the married. However, the love gap across income categories of 55 percentage points is reduced

Figure 1

Questions: (*Time/CNN*) Are you in love?; (*Gallup*) Right now would you say you are in love with someone of the opposite sex--that is, have strong romantic feelings towards them?



Source: Surveys by Yankelovich Clancy Shulman for *Time/CNN*, January 16, 1992; and the Gallup Organization, February 6-9, 1992.

to 35 percentage points when marital status is controlled for. Moreover, this relationship does not prevail across the entire income distribution but only among those with yearly incomes below \$20,000.⁹ To the extent that a relationship does exist, the pattern suggests that having enough income to be out of poverty may alleviate financial problems enough to reduce stress and thereby facilitate feelings of love. If the Gallup survey is correct, that married people with low incomes are less likely to be in love than those with moderate-to-high incomes, it may be because low financial resources create stresses on marital relationships leading people to fall out of love.

Endnotes:

¹ *Time Magazine*, "Vox Pop," February 15, 1993, p. 13.
² Norman M. Bradburn and David Caplovitz, *Report on Happiness: A Pilot Study of Behavior Related to Mental Health* (Chicago: Aldine, 1965); Norman Bradburn, *The Structure of Psychological Well-Being* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969);

Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, and Willard L. Rodgers, *The Quality of American Life: Perceptions, Evaluations and Satisfaction* (New York: Russell Sage, 1976); and Joseph Veroff, Elizabeth Douvan, and Richard A. Kulka, *The Inner American: A Self-Portrait from 1957 to 1976* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

³ Veroff, *et al*, *The Inner American*, pp. 390, 466.

⁴ Campbell, *et al*, *The Quality of American Life*, p. 376.

⁵ Campbell, *et al*; *The Quality of American Life*; Melvin Pollner, "Divine Relations, Social Relations, and Well-Being," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, March 1989, pp. 92-104; and Angus Campbell, *The Sense of Well-Being in America: Recent Patterns and Trends* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), p. 77.

⁶ Kathryn D. Rettig, Sharon M. Danes, and Jean W. Bauer, "Family Life Quality: Theory and Assessment in Economically Stressed Farm Families," *Social Indicators Research*, 1991, pp. 269-299; Gary R. Lee, "Age at Marriage and

Marital Satisfaction: A Multivariate Analysis with Implications for Marital Stability," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, August 1977, pp. 493-504; Linda S. Geiss, Dennis R. McSevency, and H. Hugh Floyd, Jr., "Parenthood and Marital Happiness," *International Journal of Sociology of the Family*, Spring 1983, pp. 159-176; and Campbell, *The Sense of Well-Being in America*, p. 58.

⁷ Several alternative multivariate models were also tried using additional variables (e.g. residence, gender, political ideology) and different combinations. No important differences emerged across these various models.

⁸ Details available from author.

⁹ In the end, the results of findings on the relationship of money and love resemble the findings on psychological well-being and marital happiness and satisfaction. Both results are mixed, and the independent relations that remain statistically significant are moderate in strength.

Tom W. Smith is director,
 General Social Survey,
 National Opinion Research Center,
 University of Chicago