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# Love

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Recently social scientists have begun to systematically gather information about love. For up-to-date reviews of research in this area see S. Duck and R. Gilmore (1981 a,b,c), *Personal relationships,* volumes 1-3, E. Hatfield and R. L. Rapson (1993), *Love, sex, and intimacy: Their psychology, biology and history,* or E. Hatfield and R. L. Rapson (1995), *Love and sex: Cross-cultural perspectives.*

## What is Love?

Most researchers agree that "love" comes in a variety of of forms. Fisher, Shaver, and Carnochan (1990), for example, point out that "love" encompasses two kinds of emotions: passionate love (which they label infatuation) and companionate love (which they label fondness.) Scientists find that most young people understand the difference between "being in love" and "loving" someone. When besotted lovers hear the dreaded mantra: "I love you, but I'm not *in love* with you," generally their hearts sink. Men and women in a variety of nations, single or married, homosexual or heterosexual, appear to resonate to this distinction (see, for example, the work of Fehr, 1993.)

Hatfield and Rapson (1993), too, distinguish between *passionate* love and *companionate* love. Passionate love is an intensely emotional state identified with a confusion of feelings: tenderness and sexuality, elation and pain, anxiety and relief, altruism and jealousy. It is defined (p. 5) as:

> A state of intense longing for union with another.
>
> A complex functional whole including appraisals or appreciations, subjective feelings, expressions, patterned physiological processes, action tendencies, and instrumental behaviors. Reciprocated love (union with the other) is associated with fulfillment and ecstasy; unrequited love (separation) is associated with emptiness, anxiety, or despair. A state of profound physiological arousal.

The *Passionate Love Scale* was designed to assess the cognitive, physiological, and behavioral incidents of such love (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986). This entry is concerned with this form of love. Companionate love, on the other hand, is a less intense emotion, combining feelings of friendly affection and deep attachment. It is characterized by friendship, understanding, and a concern for the welfare of the other. It is defined as "the affection people feel for those with whom their lives are deeply entwined.

Other scientists have proposed a variety of definitions and typologies of love. Sternberg (1998), for example, proposed a triangular theory of love. He argued that different kinds of love differ in how much of three different components—passion, intimacy, and the decision/commitment to stay together—they possess. Passionate love (which he labeled infatuation), for example,

involves intense passionate arousal but little intimacy or commitment. Companionate love involves less passion and far more intimacy and commitment. The most complete form of love is consummate love—which requires passion, intimacy, and commitment.

**Is Passionate Love a Cultural Universal?**

Since Darwin's classic treatise (1871) on *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex,* scientists have debated the universality/non-universality of romantic love. Once, scientists assumed that passionate love was primarily a Western phenomenon. Today, most anthropologists assumed that passionate love is a cultural universal. Anthropologists Jankowiak and Fischer (1992), for example, drew a sharp distinction between "romantic passion" and "simple lust." In order to determine how common romantic love was, worldwide, they selected a sampling of tribal societies from the *Standard Cross-Cultural Sample*. They found that in almost all of these far flung societies, young lovers talked about passionate love, recounted tales of love, sang love songs, and talked about the longings and anguish of infatuation. When passionate affections clashed with parents' or elders' wishes, young people often eloped. The authors concluded that romantic love *is* a pan-human characteristic.

Cross-cultural researchers, anthropologists, and historians, point out that there is cultural variability in how *common* such feelings are, however.

**Do Men and Women in Different Cultures Differ in Their Views of Love?**

Culture has been found to have a significant impact on how men and women view passionate love. Shaver, Wu, and Schwartz (1991), for example, interviewed young people in America, Italy, and the People's Republic of China about their emotional experiences. In all cultures, men and women identified the same emotions as basic, prototypic emotions—these were joy/happiness, love/attraction, fear, anger/hate, and sadness/depression. They also agreed as to whether the various emotions should be labeled as positive experiences (such as joy) or negative ones (such as fear, anger, or sadness). They agreed completely except, that is, about one emotion—love. Americans and Italians tended to equate love with happiness—both passionate and companionate love were assumed to be intensely positive experiences. Chinese students, however, had a darker view of passion. In China there were few “happy-love” ideographs. Passionate love tended to be associated with sadness, pain, and heartache. Chinese men and women generally associated passionate love with such ideographs as infatuation, unrequited love, nostalgia, and sorrow-love.

**What do Men and Women Desire in Romantic Partners, Sexual Partners, and Mates?**

Throughout the world, young men and women desire many of the same things in a mate. In a cross-cultural study, Buss (1994) asked over 10,000 men and women from thirty-seven countries, located on six continents and five islands to indicate what they valued in mates. The thirty-seven cultures represented a tremendous diversity of geographic, cultural, political, ethnic,

religious, racial, economic, and linguistic groups. Of utmost importance was love! High in the list of things men and women cared about were character, emotional stability and maturity, a pleasing disposition, education and intelligence, health, sociability, a desire for home and children, refinement, good looks, and ambition.

Scientists have documented that a major determinant of sexual "chemistry" is physical attractiveness (Hatfield and Sprecher, 1986b). There are probably three reasons why people find the attractive so appealing: (1) good looks are in and of themselves aesthetically pleasing; (2) there is prestige associated with merely being *seen* with a good-looking partner; (3) in accordance with the "beautiful is good" stereotype, most people assume that the beautiful possess socially desirable personality traits and lead happier and more successful lives than do unattractive persons. (Indeed, the stereotype may be correct.); (4) attractiveness may be a marker for "evolutionary fitness" (Cunningham, 1991; Thornhill & Gangestad, 1993). Of course, although almost everyone is attracted to good-looking partners, most people have to settle for partners who physical attractiveness matches their own.

People also tend to fall in love with people who are similar to themselves in attitudes, religious affiliation, values, interests, and education (Byrne, 1971). There are several possible explanations for why this is so. First, people are more likely to encounter similar than dissimilar others: people of the same socioeconomic status tend to live in the same neighborhoods, go to the same schools, join the same clubs. Second, there are social pressures to interact

with similar others: people are discouraged from falling in love with people from different socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, or religious backgrounds, or with those who are of an “unsuitable” ages. Finally, in cost/benefit terms, it is more rewarding (and less costly) to interact with others who confirm our beliefs about reality.

Some researchers have argued that people tend to fall in love with those who complement them in certain ways, as suggested by the old clichÈ “Opposites attract.” Winch (1958) for example, argued that people fall in love with those who complete and/or complement their own personalities and needs. Unfortunately, other researchers have been unable to replicate the Winch findings. All in all, the data indicate that people tend to select mates who possess similar, rather than complementary, personalities and needs.

*Proximity* is perhaps the most important determinant of who people end up choosing as friends, lovers, and spouses. Often people end up marrying mates who live only a few blocks away (Clarke, 1952). In generally, the closer people are to others, the more chance they have to become familiar with them; knowledge quite often leads to attraction and love. In addition, when people are in close proximity to others, there are more chances to be in rewarding situations with them. (Newcomb, 1956). Needless to say, people are attracted to others who provide them with rewarding experiences.

**Do Men and Women Desire the Same Thing in Mates?**

Many sociobiologists argue that there should be major differences in what men and women desire in romantic partners and mates. An animal’s

“fitness,” they point out, depends on how successful it is in transmitting its genes to subsequent generations. Thus, it is to both men’s and women’s evolutionary advantage to produce as many progeny as possible. Men and women differ, however, in their “ideal” reproductive strategies: men seek quantity, women quality in a mate if they are to maximize reproductive outcomes. This logic led Buss (1994) to propose a "sexual strategies theory" of human mating. Men and women, he argues, are genetically programmed to desire different traits in potential mates. Men prefer women who are physically attractive, healthy, and young and they desire sexual encounters with a variety of partners. Women seek out men who possess status, power, and money; men who are willing to make a commitment, are kind and considerate, and who like children. They are hesitant to risk sexual encounters. Buss and his colleagues (Buss, 1994) have collected considerable evidence in support of these hypotheses.

Many anthropologists, historians, sociologists, and psychologists have sharply criticized the evolutionary approach. Sociobiologists themselves acknowledge that probably the main way in which *Homo sapiens* differ from their rivals is in their unrivaled ability to adapt—to change themselves and their worlds. In different times and places, men and women have been forced to adapt to very different social realities. Men and women possess different attitudes, these critics continue, not because they are propelled by ancient genetic codes, but because they are responding to different sociocultural realities. Critics point out that for most of human history, men and women who

desired passionate liaisons and/or indulged in casual sex were likely to face very different consequences. As Smuts (1991) observes:

> In a variety of cultures, women have had their genitals cut out or sewn together to discourage sexual activity; their movements curtailed by mutilation of the feet, the threat of rape, and confinement to guarded harems; their noses bitten off in culturally sanctioned responses to adultery. Because of these and other similar practices, women associate sex with danger. (p. 29).

Smuts points out that evidence from nonhuman primates and from women in societies with relatively few coercive constraints on female sexual behavior, such as the °Kung San or modern Scandinavia, makes it clear that under permissive conditions women are far more active and assertive sexually and far more excited by sexual variety.

**Is Passionate Love an Intensely Pleasurable or an Intensely Painful Experience?**

For centuries, theorists have bitterly disagreed over what passionate love "really" is. Is it an intensely pleasurable experience or an intensely painful one? Kendrick and Cialdini (1977) argued that passionate love is explained by the same reinforcement principles that explain interpersonal attraction in general. They argued that the more potent the rewards people receive from others the more they will love them. Thus they insist that passionate love is stimulated by intensely positive experiences and dampened by intensely negative ones.

A minority of theorists take the opposite tack. Stoller (1979) in *Sexual Excitement* (p. 6) argues:

> My theory is as follows: . . . It is hostility—the desire, overt or hidden, to harm another person—that generates and enhances sexual excitement. The absence of hostility leads to sexual indifference and boredom. The following . . . contribute to sexual excitement in general: hostility, mystery, risk, illusion, revenge, reversal of trauma or frustration to triumph, safety factors, and dehumanization (fetishization.) Two unpleasant thoughts: first, when one tabulates the factors that produce sexual excitement, exuberance—pure joyous pleasure—is for most people at the bottom of the list, rarely found outside fiction. Second, I would guess that only in the rare people who can indefinitely contain sexual excitement and love within the same relationship do hostility and secrecy play insignificant parts in producing excitement.

Finally, most social psychologists (see E. Hatfield and R. L. Rapson's (1993) *Love, sex, and intimacy* or (1995) *Love and sex: Cross-cultural perspectives* or D. Tennov's (1979) *Love and limerence)* agree that both pleasure and pain can fuel passion. They would endorse the old adage: "The opposite of love is not hate but indifference."

The evidence suggests that for most people love is associated with both pleasure and pain and may be stimulated by either. Tennov, for example, interviewed more than 500 passionate lovers. She discovered that passionate

love is associated with both intensely positive and intensely negative experiences.

There are physiological reasons why love might be linked to both pleasure and pain. Physiologically love, delight, and pain have one thing in common—they are intensely arousing. Joy, passion, excitement as well as anger, envy, and hate all produce a "sympathetic" response in the nervous system. This is evidenced by the "symptoms" associated with all these emotions: a flushed face, sweaty palms, weak knees, butterflies in the stomach, dizziness, a pounding heart, trembling hands, and accelerated breathing. For this reason, theorists point out that either delight or pain (or a combination of the two) should have the potential to fuel a passionate experience.

An abundance of evidence supports the common-sense contention that, under the right conditions, intensely positive experiences such as euphoria, sexual fantasizing (Stephan et al., 1971), an understanding partner, or general excitement (Zuckerman, 1979) can fuel passion. But there is also some evidence for the more intriguing contention that under the right conditions, anxiety and fear (Hoon et al., 1977), jealousy (Clanton & Smith, 1986), loneliness (Russell, et al., 1978), anger (Barclay, 1969), or even grief can fuel passion.

For example, one study (Dutton & Aron, 1974) discovered a close link between fear and sexual attraction. The investigators compared reactions of young men crossing two bridges in North Vancouver. The first bridge, the Capilano Canyon Suspension Bridge, is a 450-foot-long, five-foot-wide span that

tilts, sways, and wobbles over a 230-foot-drop to rocks and shallow rapids below. The other bridge, a bit farther up-stream, is a solid, safe structure. As each young man crossed the bridge, a good-looking college woman approached him. She explained that she was doing a class project and asked if he would fill out a questionnaire for her. When the man had finished, the woman offered to explain her project "when I have more time." She wrote her telephone number on a small piece of paper, so the man could call her if he wanted more information. Which men called? The men who met the coed under frightening conditions. (Nine of the 33 men on the suspension bridge called her; only two of the men on the solid bridge called.) This research suggests that people may sometimes passionately love others not in spite of the difficulties others cause them, but because of them.

Recently, more laboratory research indicates that under the right conditions any state of intense arousal can be interpreted as the stirrings of desire—even if it is the result of an irrelevant experience such as listening to a comedy routine, jogging, or listening to a description of a mob mutilating and killing a missionary (White et al., 1981; Zillman, 1998). Strange as it sounds, then, evidence suggests that adrenalin makes the heart grow fonder. Delight is surely the most common stimulant of passionate love, yet anxiety and fear can sometimes play a part.

**How Can People Tell If Someone Loves Them?**

There are several tell-tale body signs. Lovers give away their feelings by several body signs, including special attention to physical appearance ("preening"

gestures) (Scheflen, 1965). People who love each other tend to spend a great deal of time gazing into each other's eyes (M. Argyle, 1975). They also want to touch each other and tend to stand close (Byrne, 1971; D. Morris, 1977). Perhaps most obvious of all, when people love someone, they want to spend a gret deal of time with the other and want to do things for that other.

Love and intimacy are relatively unexplored topics and will be exciting areas of work for future psychologists and social psychologists.

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