

Rozzana Sánchez Aragón

Romantic Passion: More Than Intuition
A Science of Love

For 4,000 years, artists, poets and storytellers have chanted of the delights and miseries of passionate love and sexual desire. Scholars in Istanbul, for example, have unearthed what they believe is the earliest love poem known to humankind—a 4,000 year old Sumerian poem.

Bridegroom, dear to my heart,

Goodly is your beauty honeysweet.

You have captivated me, let me stand trembling before you;

Bridegroom, I would be taken to the bedchamber.

Yet, until recently, social psychologists knew very little about the nature of passionate love and sexual desire. In 1969, when Ellen Berscheid and I wrote *Interpersonal Attraction*, we were able to find precious little scientific research on these topics. We were forced to speculate about the nature of love with little or no data (and shockingly little experience of our own) to guide us. Worse yet, scientists daring (or foolhardy) enough to attempt to remedy this sad situation, were attacked by politicians and religious leaders, dismissed by their peers, and mocked by the public. These topics, said some, were inherently “soft headed” and “unscientific.”

What a change has occurred in 30+ years! (And pioneers like Rozzana Sánchez Aragón have helped to bring about that change.) We live in a time of amazing scientific ferment. Today, scholars from a variety of theoretical disciplines— social psychologists, anthropologists, evolutionary psychologists, microbiologists, neuroendocrinologists, and more—are addressing these topics. They are employing an impressive array of new techniques as well: Primatologists are studying primates in the wild and in captivity. Neuroscientists are pouring over fMRIs; chemists are studying the biochemistry of passionate love and sexual

desire. Historians are now studying history from the “bottom up” rather than the “top down.” They are examining less the lives of kings and queens and more those of the majority of our deceased sisters and brothers, utilizing demographic data (marriage, birth, death, and divorce records) architectural and archaeological remains, medical manuals, church edicts, law cases, song lyrics, and whatever diaries and letters they can find. Evolutionary psychologists are conducting hundreds of studies into casual romantic encounters and mate selection.

Recently, my husband, Richard L. Rapson, and I summarized this impressive research in: *Love, Sex, and Intimacy: Their Psychology, Biology, and History*, and also in *Love and Sex: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*. (The first book details everything scientists and scholars know about passionate love and intimacy in the West, including the formation, maintenance, and ending of relationships. The second text considers passionate love worldwide.)

What are we missing in this impressive array of research? Two major things—and that Dr. Sánchez Aragón’s text provides. This first is a cultural perspective. Cultural critics such as Hazel Markus and Shinobu Kitayama have pointed out that until very recently social psychology has been “Made in America.” Theories conceived by

Western psychologists were tested in the West with Western participants and disseminated in Western scientific publications. (The Westerncentric bias has been so pervasive that, as the old joke goes, “even the rats were white.”) Dr. Sánchez Aragón’s provides an international perspective that is badly needed.

A second thing that has been lacking is an awareness that passionate love possesses a light and a dark side. In this text, Dr. Sánchez Aragón attempts to provide a complete picture of love—the joys and delights of requited love . . . as well as the anxiety, misery, and sadness that may be sparked by unrequited love, jealousy, and loss.