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Romance

Social psychologists have defined “romance” in a variety of ways.

These include: (1) Tales of idealized romantic love between two lovers; (2) A dreamy, imaginative, cognitive state in which people imagine a perfect love relationship; (3) A *feeling* of romantic or passionate love.

In the early 1950, social psychologists focused on romantic love, attempting to discover if couples attitudes toward romantic love (Were they romantic or pragmatic?) had an impact on marital happiness and stability. A popular scale at that time was Charles Hobart’s “Romantic Love Scale.” It contained such items as: “When one is in love . . . one lives almost solely for the other.” Later, Zick Rubin (1973) developed a more modern scale to measure romantic love versus friendship. Rubin argued that romantic love was made up of three elements: attachment, caring, and intimacy.

A. Definitions

In recent years, however, scientists’ attention has shifted to passionate love. *Passionate love* (sometimes called “obsessive love,” “infatuation,” “lovesickness,” “romantic love,” or “being-in-love”) is a powerful emotional state. It has been defined as:

A state of intense longing for union with another. Passionate love is 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 feelings of emptiness, anxiety, and despair (Hatfield & Rapson, 1993, p. 5.)

The *Passionate Love Scale* is designed to tap into the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral indicants of such longings (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986.)

B. Genetic and Biological Bases of Love, Lust, and Attachment.

Recently, social psychologists, neuro-scientists, and physiologists have begun to explore the links between romantic and passionate love, sexual desire, and sexual behavior. The first neuroscientists to study romantic and passionate love were Niels Birbaumer and his colleagues (1993). They concluded passionate love was “mental chaos.” More recently, Andreas Bartels and Semir Zeki (2000) studied the neural bases of passionate love using fMRI (brain imaging) techniques. They interviewed young men and women from 11 countries who claimed to be “truly, deeply, and madly” in love and who scored high on the *Passionate Love Scale*. They discovered that passionate love produced increased activity in the brain areas associated with euphoria and reward, and decreased levels of activity in the areas associated with distress and depression. Passionate love and sexual arousal appeared to be tightly linked. Other psychologists who have studied the links between

passionate love and sexual desire (using fMRI techniques) have found similar results (Fisher, 2004.)

Scientists interested in the chemistry of passionate love, sexual desire, and mating have found that a variety of neurochemicals shape romantic love, passionate love, and sexual desire, and sexual mating (Carter, 1998; Marazziti & Canale, 2004.) One theorist, Helen Fisher (2004), argues that passionate love, lust, and attachment are associated with slightly different chemical reactions—although generally coming together in a single package. According to Fisher, passionate love is associated with the natural stimulant dopamine (and perhaps norepinephrine and serotonin.) Lust is associated primarily with the hormone testosterone. Attachment (a commitment to another) is produced primarily by the hormones oxytocin and vasopressin.

Psychologists may differ on whether romantic and passionate love are or are not emotions and whether passionate love, sexual desire, and sexual motivation are closely related constructs (both neurobiologically and physiologically) or very different in their natures. Nonetheless, this path-breaking research has the potential to answer age-old questions as to the nature of culture, love, and human sexuality.

C. Cultural Differences in Romantic Attitudes, Feelings, and Behavior.

Passionate love is as old as humankind. (The Sumerian love fable of Inanna and Dumuzi was spun by tribal storytellers in 2,000 BCE.) People in all cultures also recognize the power of romantic love. In South Indian Tamil

families, for example, a person who falls head-over-heels in love with another is said to be suffering from *mayakkam*—dizziness, confusion, intoxication, and delusion. The wild hopes and despairs of love are thought to “mix you up” (Trawick, 1990.)

At one time, however, social commentators contended that the idealization of romantic and passionate love was a peculiarly Western institution. Thus, cultural researchers began to investigate the impact of culture on people’s definitions of love, what they desired in romantic partners, their likelihood of falling in love, the intensity of their passion, and their willingness to acquiesce in arranged marriages *versus* insisting on marrying for love. When social psychologists explored folk conceptions of love in a variety of cultures—including the People’s Republic of China, Indonesia, Micronesia, Palau, and Turkey—they were surprised to find that men and women in all these cultures possessed surprisingly similar views of romantic love and other “feelings of the heart” (see Jankowiak, 1995, Shaver, Murdaya, & Fraley, 2001, for a review of this research.) Subsequent research by cultural and evolutionary psychologists discovered that there appear to be cultural universals in what men and women desire in mates (Buss, 1994), in their likelihood of being in love, in how intensely they love, and whether or not they would be willing to marry someone they did not love (Hatfield & Rapson, 1996).

One impact of globalization (and the ubiquitous MTV, Hollywood and Bollywood movies, chat rooms, and foreign travel) may be to insure that young people are becoming increasingly similar in their definitions of love and their

romantic aspirations and behavior than one might expect (Hatfield & Rapson, 1996; Hatfield, et al., 2007.)

D. How Long Does Love Last?

Like any intense emotion, passionate love does tend to erode with time. Jane Traupmann and Elaine Hatfield (1981), for example, interviewed a random sample of dating couples, newlyweds, and older women (who had been married an average of 33 years) in Madison, Wisconsin. (The longest marriage was 59 years.) The authors assumed that passionate love would decline precipitously with time; they expected to companionate love to last far longer. They were wrong. Over time, passionate love did plummet. Couples started out loving their partners intensely. Both steady daters and newlyweds expressed “a great deal of passionate love” for their mates. But after many years of marriage, women reported that they and their husbands now felt only “some” passionate love for one another. And what of the fate of companionate love? The authors found that over time, both passionate and companionate love tended to decline, at approximately the same rate.

This finding was especially surprising since the the authors were only interviewing couples whose marriages had survived for 10, 20, or 50 years. Couples whose relationships were the most dismal, may well have divorced and thus been lost from the sample.

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