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Romantic Passion

Romantic Passion: A Universal Experience? Edited by William Jankowiak. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, 310 pages. Cloth, \$27.50.

Reviewed by Elaine Hatfield, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, The University of Hawaii, 2430 Campus Road, Honolulu, HI 96822.

Romantic Passion is a delightful and informative book. Recently, scholars from a variety of intellectual disciplines—anthropology, psychology, sociology, primatology, sociobiology, history, molecular biology, chemistry, literature, and art—have made several surprising discoveries:

Passionate love seems to be a cultural universal.

Scholars once assumed that romantic and passionate love were Western "inventions." In *Romantic Passion*, anthropologists examine the ethnographic record and conclude that passionate love may well be a cultural universal. The chapters contain touching portraits of the euphoria, exhilaration, obsession, yearning, hurt, and disappointment young lovers worldwide experience. These words could have been spoken by our families and friends. Two typical descriptions are these: Nigeria: "Onabu was very beautiful. When I saw her, she took away my life" (p. 134); Polynesia: "You don't want anything else; you die for love, but you don't mind if you die; you don't feel ashamed about loving that person to death. If you really love someone, nothing will stop you" (p. 107).

Societies differ markedly in their views of passionate love.

Although passion seems to be a cultural universal, ethnographic reports make it clear that societies differ markedly in how they view tender passions. In many societies, parents, religious leaders, and secular authorities have labored to keep these disruptive passions in check. Lovers are branded as narcissistic, selfish, mentally unstable, mad, foolish, immoral, and disloyal. Tales remind lovers that passion is likely to end in disgrace or death. Nonetheless, many young people worldwide are willing to risk everything to be with their lovers.

The authors of *Romantic Passion* present material that will be unfamiliar to many sexologists, and the authors fail to cite many correlational and experimental studies that make up *our* canon. Nonetheless, it is encouraging that these scholars, from very different disciplines, come to many of the same conclusions. Not only do they seem to agree that passion is far more common than previous theorists have assumed, but the *changes* that they observe in their small societies seem to mirror the changes that social psychologists have observed in the realm of love worldwide.

Recently, Richard L. Rapson and I (1993, 1996) reviewed more than 1,500 observational studies, surveys, and experiments that have been conducted on passionate love and sexual desire worldwide. On the basis of this review, we concluded that three types of transformations seem to be occurring worldwide. Theorists have attributed these changes to Westernization, modernization, urbanization, industrialization, what have you. Whatever the reason, these changes seem to have a profound impact on romantic and sexual attitudes, feelings, and behaviors.

First, there seems to be an increasing belief in the equality of men and women and of majority and minority groups. Men and women

worldwide seem to be becoming more similar in their sexual preferences, feelings, and experiences. There seems to be a continuing erosion of the sexual double standard; a greater acceptance of heterosexuality, bisexuality, or homosexuality; and broader cultural definitions of the institution of family.

Of course, the world is still far from gender equality and an acceptance of sexual diversity. As we approach the end of the 20th century, male supremacy continues to be the rule worldwide—even in the West. Recent United Nations human rights conference participants have itemized the staggering array of human rights violations that are routinely inflicted upon women throughout the world. For example, in the Sudan and Somalia, girls are ritually mutilated. In Burma and Thailand, very young girls are often coerced into prostitution. In Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, household maids are often beaten and raped. The list of abuses include female infanticide, genital mutilation, the sale of brides, dowry murders, *sut-tee*, and discriminatory laws against women's civic, social, and legal equality. Yet there are signs around the world that dramatic transformations in the role of women are infiltrating some sanctuaries of the most deeply entrenched male-dominated cultures. There is also sparse evidence of an increasing acceptance of sexual diversity worldwide.

Second, there is a belief that the pursuit of happiness and the avoidance of pain are desirable goals in life. There seems to be increasing acceptance worldwide of the idea that people are entitled to pursue happiness and avoid pain. Traditionally, many parents, religions—including Christianity and most varieties of Hinduism and Buddhism—and political authorities, laboring to stem the tide of self-interest and individualism, asked young people to repress individual desire.

It appears that throughout the world there is a growing acceptance

that the pursuit of happiness is a worthwhile goal. Societies have begun to accept a more positive view of passionate love and sexual desire, no longer seeing them as evil. There seems to be a worldwide increase in premarital sexual activity and sexual permissiveness, a growing acceptance of birth control, a belief that individuals should be permitted to marry for love (rather than submitting to arranged marriages), and the capacity to terminate unhappy marriages by divorce.

Third, there is a belief that change and improvement in life are attainable and that action toward those ends may be preferable to resignation and the passive acceptance of age-old traditions. Modernism has wrought its most far-reaching change with its onslaught on fatalism. The possibility of progress outweighs hopelessness and resignation in most places in the world.

The anthropological reports in *Romantic Passion* provide a fascinating picture of how these changes affect the small societies that the authors have studied. All and all, *Romantic Passion* is well worth reading.

References

- Hatfield, E., & Rapson, R. L. (1993). *Love, sex, and intimacy: Their psychology, biology, and history*. New York: Harper-Collins.
- Hatfield, E., & Rapson, R. L. (1996). *Love and sex: Cross-cultural perspectives*. New York: Allyn & Bacon.

A Triumph of Skepticism: Nailing Down the Coffin of "Ritual Abuse"

Satan's Silence: Ritual Abuse and the Making of a Modern Witch Hunt. By Debbie Nathan and Michael Snedeker. New York: Basic Books, 1995, 317 pages. Hardcover, \$25.00.

Reviewed by Paul Okami, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563.

When I teach undergraduate human sexuality-related courses, I begin by emphasizing that my orientation is toward a scientific approach to knowledge, a critical constituent of which is a *skeptical* outlook. Does that mean a *cynical* outlook? students ask. No. It means only that we ought to withhold acceptance of claims—particularly claims that appear to violate known principles or previously accepted knowledge—until reasonable supportive evidence is presented.

Unfortunately, my students have not typically acquired their knowledge of social facts in this manner. The tendency is for them to have absorbed knowledge through "buzzes" in the social atmosphere, consisting of self-help books, talk shows, popular magazine and newspaper articles, political tracts, social criticism, personal experience (filtered through various schemas and belief systems), and the opinions of family, friends, and teachers. In their book, Debbie Nathan and Michael Snedeker document the consequences of this sort of approach to apprehending social facts. *Satan's Silence* is a triumph of the spirit of skepticism.

This is not, however, a scientific work. The authors are a well-known investigative journalist and a criminal defense lawyer, respectively. Nevertheless, the book is the most comprehensive and analytically lucid work to date detailing the emergence and pervasive acceptance—despite a complete lack of supportive evidence—of the notion that "respectable" adults throughout the world are engaged in the ritual sexual abuse, torture, and slaughter of small children. An earlier, excellent edited book of scholarly papers (Richardson, Best, & Bromley, 1991) has traversed some of the same territory, but the current volume weaves many insights expressed in the Richardson et al. book into a tighter, more inclusive, updated, and generally accessible work—while perhaps losing some of the former's theoretical sophistica-

tion. Nevertheless, Nathan and Snedeker approach their material from a posture of theory and research far more sophisticated and better informed by behavioral science than the large majority of books of this type. *Satan's Silence* is therefore very strongly recommended to anyone—professional or lay person—with an interest in a range of topics, including child sexual abuse, sexual politics, urban legends and folklore, and millennialist American history.

In my view, one early chapter alone, titled "Demonology," is worth more than the price of the book, quite literally. The 21 pages of this chapter concisely organize material I have been presenting to students in the form of expensive readers running into hundreds of pages! No more. This chapter synthesizes findings and theory from a broad literature in psychology, sociology, anthropology, world history, folklore, and political science to make comprehensible the otherwise incomprehensible fact of widespread belief by intelligent people—including large numbers of mental health professionals and respected researchers—in events that appear not only to have never happened, but that *could not have happened* according to known laws of logic, physics, medical science, and various behavioral sciences.

For example, for these events to have occurred, one must accept such as the following: (a) people can be in two places at the same time; (b) grotesquely bloody cannibalistic orgies are occurring repeatedly throughout the nation without leaving a trace of evidence; (c) tens of thousands of American babies can be missing with no one noticing, no reports made, and no evidence that the babies existed in the first place; (d) tiny infants and toddlers can be brutally penetrated vaginally and anally by adult male penises and sharp knives without causing the slightest physical trauma; (e) entire daycare center classrooms of toddlers can be forced repeatedly to partici-

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