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## **Love**

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### **What is Love?**

In romantic relationships, psychologists distinguish between *passionate* love and *companionate* love. Passionate love is defined as an intense longing for union with the other. It is associated with a confusion of feelings: tenderness and sexuality, elation and pain, anxiety and relief, altruism and jealousy (see Hatfield & Rapson, 1993, 1995 for a review of this research.) Companionate love, a less intense emotion, is characterized by affection, intimacy, attachment, and a concern for the welfare of the other (see Sternberg, 1998.)

### **Is Passionate Love a Cultural Universal?**

Since Darwin's classic treatise on *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, scientists have debated the universality of romantic love. Once, scientists assumed that passionate love was a Western phenomenon. Today, most assume it to be a cultural universal. In one study, anthropologists selected a sampling of tribal societies from the *Standard Cross-Cultural Sample*. They found that in 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. It appears that romantic

love *is* a pan-human characteristic (see Jankowiak, 1995.) However, cross-cultural researchers, anthropologists, and historians point out that there is cultural variability in how *common* such feelings are.

### **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. Researchers interviewed young people in America, Italy, and the People's Republic of China about their emotional experiences. They found that in all cultures, men and women identified the same prototypic emotions—joy/happiness, love/attraction, fear, anger/hate, and sadness/depression. Men and women also agreed as to whether emotions were positive experiences (such as joy) or negative ones (such as fear, anger, or sadness). The only exception was in the case of love. Americans and Italians tended to equate love with joy and happiness. Chinese students had a darker view of passion, associating it with sadness, pain, and heartache.

### **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 one cross-cultural study, Buss (1994) asked over 10,000 men and women from 37 countries to indicate what they valued in mates. The cultures represented a tremendous diversity of geographic, cultural, political, ethnic, religious, racial, economic, and linguistic groups. Of utmost importance was love! High on 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. People also tend to fall in love with people who are similar to themselves in attitudes, religious affiliation, values, interests, education, and socioeconomic status.

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

Evolutionary psychologists argue that there are major differences in what men and women desire in romantic partners and mates. An animal’s “fitness” depends on how successful it is in transmitting its genes to subsequent generations. It is to both men’s and women’s evolutionary advantage to produce as many progeny as possible. Men and women differ, however, in “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; who are willing to make a commitment, who are kind and considerate, and who like children. Buss and his colleagues have collected considerable evidence in support of these hypotheses.

Many anthropologists, historians, sociologists, and psychologists have sharply criticized the evolutionary approach. They point out that *Homo sapiens* possess an unrivaled ability to adapt—to change themselves and their worlds. 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. 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. Is it surprising, then that even today many women fear risky sexual experiments?

There is evidence from nonhuman primates and from women in societies with few coercive constraints on female sexual behavior, such as the °Kung San or modern Scandinavia, 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? Some psychologists argue that passionate love is explained by the same reinforcement principles that explain interpersonal attraction in general. They contend that passionate love is stimulated by intensely positive experiences and dampened by intensely negative ones.

Other theorists take the opposite tack. They argue that passion can be fueled by admiration for a social ideal, a desire to expand one’s horizons, a

yearning for challenge, mystery, and excitement . . . and sometimes even anger and hostility (see Aron & Aron, 1986). Most social psychologists would probably agree that both pleasure and pain can fuel passion. They would endorse the old adage: “The opposite of love is not hate but indifference.”

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, and 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 commonsense contention that, under the right conditions, intensely positive experiences such as euphoria, sexual fantasizing, an understanding partner, or general excitement can fuel passion. But there is also some evidence for the more intriguing contention that under the right conditions, anxiety and fear, jealousy, loneliness, anger, or even grief can fuel passion (see Hatfield & Rapson, 1993; Zillmann, 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.

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