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**Close Romantic Relationships: Maintenance and Enhancement**

By John Harvey and Amy Wenzel (Eds.)

Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2001, 400 pp. ISBN #0-8058-3552-0. \$37.50 paperback.

*Review by Elaine Hatfield*

**“What’s Love Got to Do With It?”**

*‘Hubb’ is love, “ishq” is love that entwines two people together, ‘shagha’ is love that nests in the chambers of the heart, ‘hayam’ is love that wanders the earth, ‘teeh’ is love in which you lose yourself, ‘walah’ is love that carries sorrow within it, ‘sababah’ is love that exudes from your pores, ‘hawa’ is love that shares its name with ‘air’ and with ‘falling’, ‘gharm’ is love that is willing to pay the price.*

—Ahdaf Soueif—

In the 1960s, when Ellen Berscheid and I (Berscheid & Hatfield, 1969) began the first review of the social psychological literature on passionate love and sexual desire (for a text we were writing on *Interpersonal Attraction*,) we were stunned to discover that almost no research existed on these topics! In the end, since we were determined at least to mention these forms of interpersonal attraction, all we could do was cobble together our own theoretical speculations about love (based on our own personal experience and that of our equally naïve friends and what we had gleaned from novels and films) and attempt to confirm or refute our first impressions by consulting the sparse experimental research

which did exist—a handful of studies conducted by organizational psychologists on the links between attraction and productivity.

These days, of course, all that has changed. Turn on TV and you'll find Dr. Laura, Dr. Ruth, and other talk-show hosts offering advice to shell-shocked lovers, husbands, and wives. On a sleepy Saturday, drop by Borders and there you'll find self-help books by dozens of gurus of love. You'll find paperbacks extolling the virtues of Tarot cards, astrological signs, and the mystical East in choosing a mate. You'll discover that *Men are from Mars, Women from Venus*. That *Women who Love Too Much* are likely to end up with male rats . . . and vice versa. And you'll be taught how to improve your love/sex/marital love in 10 or 20 or 30 easy steps.

Luckily, among all the dross is a great deal of spun gold.

#### **A. Previous Reviews: 1980-1990s.**

The 1980s witnessed a tremendous surge of research interest in love, sex, and intimacy. In the 1980s, for example, Steve Duck and Robin Gilmour (Duck & Gilmour, 1981 a, b, and c) inaugurated a series on the initiation, maintenance and dissolution of relationships. A decade later, two fine collections added to social psychologists' understanding of the complexities of long-term relationships. (See Canary & Stafford, 1994; and Dindia & Canary, 1993; as well as our own Hatfield & Rapson, 1993.) Since the parched 1960s when we began our work, thousands of studies and experiments on love, sex, and intimacy have been published in a variety of scientific journals.

But it has been a decade since the 1990's compendium of *Close Relationships: Their Maintenance and Enhancement*.

### **B. The Current Review**

After a painfully long hiatus, John Harvey and Amy Wenzel's fine edited book proves that the social psychology of relationship maintenance and enhancement has come of age. This text is delightful in a number of ways. Firstly, the 42 authors who contribute to this volume clearly possess the wisdom that comes from observing real people in real relationships. They display an unusual breadth of scholarship, good taste (an instinctive understanding as to what is interesting and what is not), and a methodological sophistication. Not once did I hear my curmudgeonly voice croaking: "Have these guys ever been in a relationship?" and "How could anyone who knows *anything* about people say that?"

Readers familiar with previous texts on love, sex, and intimacy will find that the Harvey and Wenzel text contains an impressive amount of material on several topics heretofore given short shrift. (This is true of necessity, since much of the theorizing and research discussed is new.)

### **C. The Importance of Relationship Maintenance and Enhancement**

Editors John Harvey and Amy Wenzel begin and end *Close Relationships* with a discussion of the importance of theorizing and research on close relationship maintenance and enhancement.

Social critics have long known that passionate love is a precarious affair. In 1830, for example, Gaetano Donizetti composed his now famous comic opera, "*L*

*'Elisir d'Amore.'*" In this opera, a young Basque villager, Nemorino, falls desperately in love with Adina, a rich girl who does not share his feelings. He consults Dr. Dulcamara, a seller of patent medicine, who sells him a magic potion and soon the young couple are blissfully in love. Alas, within a short time, the young lovers become all too aware of their stunning incompatibilities. When they confront Dr. Dulcamara, chastising him for the misery his "magic elixir" has brought about, the old charlatan confesses to being a fake. Alas, neither he nor anyone else knows anything about love and its complexities.

"Dr. Dulcamara" is appropriately named, since Dulcamara means "bitter-sweet." The Dulcamara is a plant that can only survive by clinging to a master plant—often strangling its host in its deadly embrace. When you taste the leaves, they are blissfully sweet—at first—but they soon turn bitter in the mouth. This, thought Donizetti, was the nature of love: a brief flicker of pleasure followed by years of bitterness and misery.

Many of the authors in Harvey and Wenzel's edited text suggest that things are much the same today. Most people consider love to be the *sine qua non* of life happiness. They start out with romantic illusions and staggering optimism about the future (Daniel Perlman; Benjamin Karney, James McNulty, and Nancy Frye). Yet, soon things soon go awry. Most relationships do not go well. We all know the statistics. Today, nearly two thirds of all first marriages end in permanent separation or divorce.

Thus, Harvey and Wenzel argue, a knowledge of close relationships plus their maintenance and enhancement is now more critically important than ever before.

#### **D. Current State of Knowledge in the Area**

The editors have divided the text into two main sections: the first on “Theoretical Approaches” and a second on “Applied Issues.”

In the first section, several authors discuss recent theorizing and research concerning several older, well-established theories. (See, for example, Judson Mills and Margaret Clark’s chapter on “Communal vs. Exchange” relationships; Daniel Canary and Laura Stafford’s chapter on a theory in which I’ve been especially interested—“Equity Theory”; Benjamin Karney, James McNulty, and Nancy Frey’s work on “Relational Beliefs and Attributions”; and Caryl Rusbult, Nils Olsen, Jody Davis, and Peggy Hannon’s fine research on “Commitment and Relationship Maintenance Mechanisms.”) The authors also call upon theories unknown a few decades ago. (See, for example, Arthur Aron, Christina Norman, and Elaine Aron’s work on “Self-expansion”; Kevin Wu’s chapter on “Evolutionary Theory”; and Erin Sahlstein and Leslie Baxter’s observations on the “Dialectic Nature of Relationships,” among others.)

In the past decade, Americans have become increasingly aware that love may take many forms. The text reflects this reality. Readers will find interesting chapters on cross-cultural and multi-cultural relationships (see Stanley Gaines and Kelly Brennan), gay and lesbian relationships, and so forth.

#### **E. The Attractions and the Problems of Love**

In our personal lives, we are well aware that if a love affair is to prosper, we must find joy and pleasure in our encounters. Yet in discussing how to save a faltering marriage, clinicians often speak as if faltering marriages can be saved

if couples simply find some way to reduce their misery to a tolerable level. In a finely wrought chapter, Shelly Gable and Harry Reiss remind us that for a love affair to succeed, “an absence of misery” is not enough. They review the various rewards and punishments that contribute to relationship satisfaction. They discuss the importance of love, trust, commitment (Caryl Rusbult, Nils Olsen, Jody Davis, and Peggy Hannon); communication (Linda Acitelli; Julia Omarzu, Joanne Whalen, and John Harvey); empathy (Jeffry Simpson, William Ickes, and Minda OriÒa); intimacy (Jennifer Bosson and William Swann); and the shared activities that make a love affair a delight. They also discuss the insecurity, alcoholism and drug addiction, depression (Heather O’Mahan, Steven Beach, and Sammy Banawan); meanness, injustice and inequities (Janice Jones, Brian Doss, and Andrew Christensen); jealousy, and conflict that contribute to a relationship’s swift demise.

In a second section, on “Applications,” 15 clinicians discuss a variety of practical techniques for dealing with the preceding problems (See Janice Jones, Brian Doss, and Andrew Christensen; Julia Omarzu, Joanne Whalen, and John Harvey). They discuss ways to deal with troubled marriages (in general) and the special challenge couples face in second marriages (Marilyn Coleman, Lawrence Ganong, and Shannon Weaver). Barbara and Irwin Sarason conclude by discussing the importance of companionship, social support, and social control in people’s lives.

In a “Summing up” chapter, Daniel Perlman wraps up the book by tracing the development of the field of close relationships from its early days to the present.

*What doesn't this book have?* A few “hot” social psychological theories were omitted or only briefly touched upon. As Daniel Perlman observes: “One notes several omissions: normative, attachment, attributional economic, sociological, and social learning theories.” There is no discussion, for example, of what Philip Shaver's and Cindy Hazan's popular Attachment Theory of romantic attraction might tell us about relationship maintenance and enhancement. Perhaps this is because, at the present, Attachment Theory still focuses more upon the beginning of relationships than with their maintenance and enhancement . . . or termination, but of course considerable research does exist in this area.

This is a classic book, one to be added to the library of anyone interested in *Close Romantic Relationships: Maintenance and Enhancement*.

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