

## Perspectives on Research Classics<sup>1</sup>: Commentary

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In college and graduate school (1955-1963), I was stunned to observe the power of passionate love in people's lives. My friends and I seemed to make the most appalling romantic choices. (All these good little Catholic, working class boys and girls seemed to long for sultry Marilyn Monroe/gangland Elvis Presley types.) We clung to our dreams with a perplexing tenacity. (If there was a .000001 chance he/she would ever call, that was good enough for us.) Love seemed to endow perfectly sensible men and women with the ability to rationalize anything. Teens who were so absent-minded and lazy that they couldn't manage to clean a sink or get a term paper in on time seemed to have endless motivation when caught up in the grip of love. (They would wait patiently by the telephone for days, waiting for the Loved One to call.) I decided that this powerful and perplexing phenomenon was certainly worth investigating.

I decided to begin trying to understand passionate love's power by attempting to discover who was vulnerable to such love and who was not. Passionate love was defined as:

"A state of intense longing for union with another. Reciprocated love (union with the other) is associated with fulfillment and ecstasy. Unrequited love (separation) with emptiness, anxiety, or despair. A state of profound physiological arousal" (Hatfield & Rapson, 1987, p. 110).

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<sup>1</sup>Hatfield (Walster), E. (1965). The effect of self-esteem on romantic liking. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 1, 184-197.

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Today, the Passionate Love Scale provides an index of this emotion. It taps the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral indicants of "longing for union" (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986). I proposed that men and women's momentary self-esteem would affect their receptivity to the affection offered by another. People whose self-esteem was temporarily low were expected to be least discriminating, most needy, and most vulnerable to passionate love. This hypothesis was tested in a simple experiment. The self-esteem of some Stanford University women was raised by giving them false personality information; the self-esteem of other women was lowered by the same technique. Women were then asked to indicate how interested they were in a handsome male confederate who had asked them for a date. (Of course, in this experiment, the debriefing was careful and lengthy. We often spent more than an hour discussing self-esteem, love, experimentation, and so forth.) As expected, self esteem and women's liking for the potential romantic partner were negatively related [Hatfield (Walster), 1965].

In the 30 years that have elapsed since this experiment, there have been two major changes in the research climate. Firstly, today many scientists are interested in close relationships. When this "classic" study was conducted, it was assumed that research on cognition and emotion (especially passionate love) was not really "respectable." Thus, my theorizing was presented in the jargon of Hullian learning theory. Passionate love and emotion were seen as important, not in their own right, but because they were "motivating"—and everyone knew that the "big D" (Drive) was important in its own right. Today, we simply take it for granted that close relationships and emotion are fascinating and important. Three societies (ISRE, ISSPR, and I/INPR) and two journals (*ISSPR Bulletin* and the *JSPR*) have been formed. In writing the *Psychology of Emotion*, John Carlson and I (in press) were able to retrieve more than 2,000 studies on

the psychology of love and emotion.

Secondly, as a consequence of this research, scientists now possess a much better understanding of passionate love and the factors involved in the initiation, maintenance, repair, or termination of relationships. Scientists from a variety of disciplines have, for the moment, accepted a paradigm that seems to explain the passion, power, and duration of passionate love. Passionate love seems to be a very primitive phenomenon; in the "triune brain," the capacity to experience such love may have been "wired-in" in the mammalian period. Primatologists argue that even non-human primates experience something very much like passionate love. Infant primates cling to their mothers. As long as mother and child are in close proximity, all goes well. If a brief separation occurs, however, the young primate becomes desperate. The child howls and rushes frantically about, searching for mother. When she returns, the young primate is joyous, clasping her and bounding about in excitement. If she does not return and frantic efforts to find her fail, the infant eventually will abandon all hope of contact, fall into despair, and probably die. This experience certainly sounds much like passionate love's desire for union with its accompanying lows and highs. This we think is the groundwork for passionate attachments.

Of course, society and individual experiences shape who people will love, how frequently and how intensely they will experience such emotions, and what the consequences of such thoughts, feelings, and expressive displays will be. Researchers from a variety of disciplines (neuroscientists, historians, sociologists, developmental psychologists, as well as social psychologists) contribute to our understanding of the effect of social pressures on the passionate experience (see Hatfield & Rapson, 1988, and Carlson & Hatfield, in press, for an overview of this research.) Studies of emotion in general and passionate love in particular, once "outlaw" fields of study, have, in the past three decades, entered the mainstream of inquiry, not only in psychology, but in a

host of other disciplines as well. This development is as revolutionary in its own way as are the political changes sweeping the world at the end of the twentieth century.

#### References

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#### September Deadline

The deadline for the September issue is August 15. Material received after the deadline will be held over for the December issue. If you submit material to a Section Editor, please allow time for him or her to get the material to the Editor.