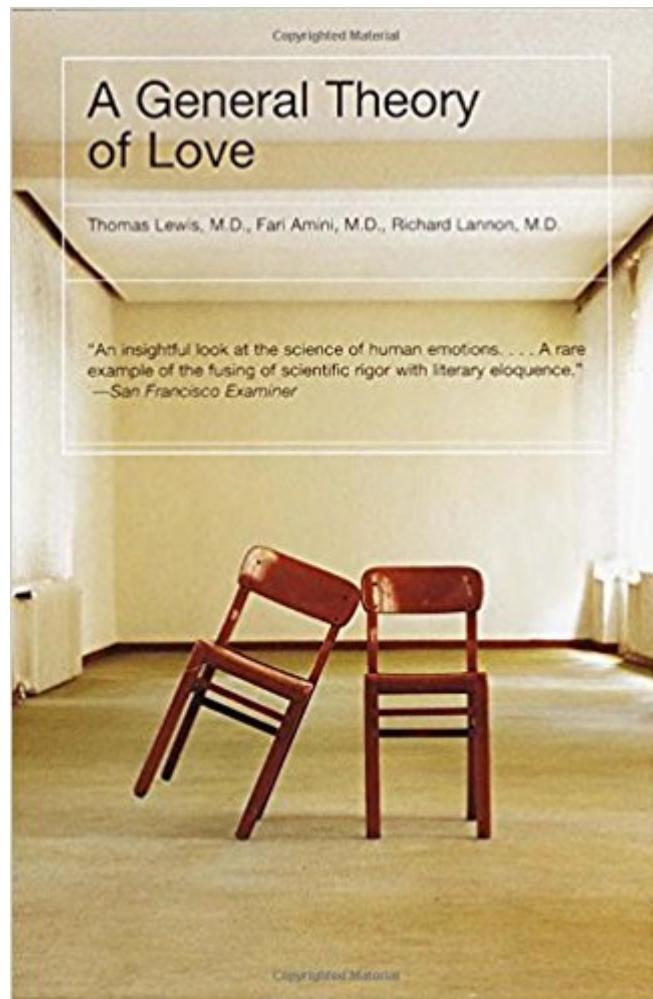


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A General Theory Of Love



Synopsis

This original and lucid account of the complexities of love and its essential role in human well-being draws on the latest scientific research. Three eminent psychiatrists tackle the difficult task of reconciling what artists and thinkers have known for thousands of years about the human heart with what has only recently been learned about the primitive functions of the human brain. A General Theory of Love demonstrates that our nervous systems are not self-contained: from earliest childhood, our brains actually link with those of the people close to us, in a silent rhythm that alters the very structure of our brains, establishes life-long emotional patterns, and makes us, in large part, who we are. Explaining how relationships function, how parents shape their child's developing self, how psychotherapy really works, and how our society dangerously flouts essential emotional laws, this is a work of rare passion and eloquence that will forever change the way you think about human intimacy.

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Customer Reviews

Poor, poor science--it gets blamed for everything. While it might be true that some of our alienation and unhappiness stem from a too-rational misunderstanding of emotion, it's also true that science is its own remedy. A General Theory of Love, by San Francisco psychiatrists Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon, is a powerfully humanistic look at the natural history of our deepest feelings, and why a simple hug is often more important than a portfolio full of stock options. Their grasp of neural science is topnotch, but the book is more about humans as social animals and how

we relate to others--for once, the brain plays second fiddle to the heart. Though some of their social analysis is less than fully thought out--surely e-mail isn't a truly unique form of communication, as they suggest--the work as a whole is strong and merits attention. Science, it turns out, does have much to say about our messy feelings and relationships. While much of it could be filed under "common sense," it's nice to know that common sense is replicable. Hard-science types will probably be exasperated with the constant shifts between data and appeals to emotional truths, but the rest of us will see in *A General Theory of Love* a new synthesis of research and poetry. --Rob Lightner --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The Beatles may have sounded naive when they assured us that "all you need is love," but they may not have been far off the mark. New research in brain function has proven that love is a human necessity; its absence damages not only individuals, but our whole society. In this stimulating work, psychiatrists Lewis, Amini and Lannon explain how and why our brains have evolved to require consistent bonding and nurturing. They contend that close emotional connections actually change neural patterns in those who engage in them, affecting our sense of self and making empathy and socialization possible. Indeed, the authors insist, "in some important ways, people cannot be stable on their own." Yet American society is structured to frustrate emotional health, they contend: self-sufficiency and materialistic goals are seen as great virtues, while emotional dependence is considered a weakness. Because our culture does not sufficiently value interpersonal relationships, we are plagued by anxiety and depression, narcissism and superficiality, which can lead to violence and self-destructive behaviors. It is futile to try to think our way out of such behaviors, the authors believe, because emotions are not within the intellect's domain. What is needed is healthy bonding from infancy; when this does not occur, the therapist must model it. The authors' utopian vision of emotional health may strike some as vague or conservative to a fault, and the clarity of their thesis is marred by indirect and precious writing. Yet their claim that "what we do inside relationships matters more than any other aspect of human life" is a powerful one. Agent, Carol Mann. 9-city author tour. Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I loved the premise of the book and the message it is trying to convey; that our emotions are a large part of who we are as humans. Intuition and live live below the surface of our cognition and are a large part of who we are. The book was needlessly hard to read. The message was often hidden within overly specific words. Though accurate and often poetic. The choice to raise the reading level

made the book harder to read, forcing frequent visits to the dictionary, and in my opinion obscured somewhat the message of the book.

In a world rather obsessed with material and concrete, this is an important book that reminds about emotional side of humans. Limbic brain is older part of the human brain. Not directly available to conscience, it generates emotions, and understand emotions of others. and does a lot of internal regulation. While we tend to downplay emotions, they are essential. For children, external emotional regulation is outright vital, to the point of affecting stability of breathing. And even in adults, social ties affect outcome of major illnesses. For everyday life, that what decides where we're happy or not. Unlike explicit memories, emotional structure of human brain is gradually constructed from everyday experiences. Neuronal pathways that fire often are becoming stronger, and start to fire even more often, in more situations, becoming "attractors". Eventually, neurons outside common pathways are heavily pruned, leaving an emotional brain structure that is relatively stable.

Thereafter, people tend to seek experiences that match the generated. Authors say: "most people will choose misery with a partner their limbic brain recognizes over the stagnant pleasure of a "nice" relationship with someone their attachment mechanisms cannot detect". Given such importance of emotional brain, modern society is badly ignorant of it. Authors specifically attack US approaches for raising children, where infants are denied emotional contact right away by being put to sleep separately, where parents rarely have enough time to express any relatedness, and where 1/3 of children are raised in mother-only households, further depriving them of emotional learning. Medicine is given some critique as well, for becoming too mechanistic and detached from the patient. Finally, they lament about false attachment between humans and corporations that has arisen. For a book written by three psychotherapists, it's surprisingly well-written, with a lively witty style.

A great book! I read a few of these types of books or articles and many are just repackaged from one or other seminal study. However, Lewis and co in this book show truly innovative ideas and go deeper into the connections between the physical brain and emotionality. The studies are highly informative and very well explained and they give a good basis for the neurological input that informs our actions and thinkings. They favor and put forward that all things are connected as they are within each human being. A great read. One of these books that I do not want to finish, want more and wished it would be longer.

This is an extraordinary book with a somewhat disarming title (patterned on Einstein's "General Theory of Relativity"). It is a very well written book setting forth the relation between brain neurology and emotions, and their joint impact on psychotherapy. The title may put some people off. I encourage readers to forge ahead. They won't be sorry. It defines the distinctions between the three basic elements of the brain: the brain stem, the limbic system, and the cortex. It describes how the limbic system, which controls emotions and which receives its input in infancy, can be matured and transformed by the interpersonal relationship of psychotherapy. The three authors represent three generations of psychiatrists at San Francisco Medical School. They see love, not in its sentimental sense but as mutual emotional resonance, as the core emotion of effective psychotherapy.

Finally. Maybe someone else has challenged science and statistics before, or written in a more straightforward style, but it's about time. Just because something can be measured does not mean it's significant. Just because brain activity produces bright colors on a screen, this is not necessarily proof of brain function. The success of human experience is much more complicated than science and math would have us believe. So little is understood about the effects of medication on the psyche. And the concept that if a little is good, more must be better has overwhelmed health care for decades. Mr Lewis uses esoteric language sometimes, but his message comes through clearly: there's more to us than we think.

Meandering, sometimes swerving, between lyricism and crisp scientific jargon, "A General Theory of Love" sets out to explain that huge part of our existence that lies below the surface waves of verbal thought. It does a damn good job, too. You may find yourself recalling moments from your early childhood as you read--however it went for you--and you'll certainly gain a new degree of sympathy for all those troubled folks in your life. The authors go from explanation of emotional development to societal consequences of breakdowns in that process, of the sort we've been inflicting upon ourselves for most of the past century. If only it were possible to solve them clearly and quickly. In short, whether you're a happy, well-adjusted person, or a total mess wondering what went wrong in your life to leave you this way, you'll learn a lot from this book. Note: I would have given this book 5 stars except for their use of backwards endnotes, which are frustratingly difficult to trace back to their referents.

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