From birth to death, love is not just the focus of human experience but also the life force of the mind, determining our moods, stabilizing our bodily rhythms, and changing the structure of our brains. The body’s physiology ensures that relationships determine and fix our identities. Love makes us who we are, and who we can become.


WHAT IS LOVE?

Identify various definitions of love and discuss three key theories that categorize types of love.

While most of us have felt something we think is “love,” it is difficult to put into words exactly what that feeling is. Shaver, Morgan, and Wu (1996) define love as a physiological reaction that engenders proximity-seeking behavior. Singer (1987) describes love as a search for friendship, beauty, and spiritual connection. Love tends to include a strong sense of attachment to another person and can involve both extremely pleasurable and intensely painful experiences. When we love another person, it’s like jumping off the high dive into a pool. Love involves risk taking. We risk getting hurt for the thrill of something like flying head first through the air. While most of this chapter will focus on romantic or passionate love (usually involving sexual and amorous partners), it will also explore the strong feelings of love we develop for our parents, friends, and children.

Scientists have not yet developed an agreed-upon definition of the concept of love. Baumeister and Leary (1995) discuss that love may be a process that provides evolutionary advantages because seeking communion with others increases one’s own chance of survival. For now, let’s define love as the subjective feeling of emotional connection with another person, often accompanied by intense desire to be near, care for, protect, or share one’s life with that person.
PASSIONATE/ROMANTIC LOVE VERSUS COMPANIONATE LOVE

Long-term romantic relationships often start out pretty differently from where they end up. When we first choose a mate, we are often obsessed with thoughts of that person. We can talk for hours without sleep or food. We can make love for longer and more often than usual. We ignore the bad things about that person and think about our future together as perfect or fairytale-like. This initial stage of a relationship is characterized by passion and romance. We often feel as if we are not living in reality, like we are floating or dreaming when we’re with our new love. This experience is referred to as romantic/passionate love.

When people have been together for a long period of time, say for many years, however, they tend to experience companionate love (Berscheid & Walster, 1978). This type of love is one of affiliation, deep respect, and a “best friendship.” The two people enjoy spending time together and feel comfortable being exactly who they really are. While passion and romance may not be completely absent from companionate relationships, they are usually less intense and occur less often than in the beginning of the relationship. However, research suggests that passion is one of the strongest predictors of relationship satisfaction (Contreras, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1996). Thus, long-term couples may have to work extra hard to rekindle their passion by scheduling intimate dates, going out of town to hotels, or celebrating anniversaries and birthdays away from the mundane happenings of their everyday lives. But don’t feel sorry for people in the throes of companionate love. They are usually quite happy. As people get older and build their lives together, passion and sex may become less essential for maintaining the relationship but those things still carry some importance for most couples.

Erik Erikson argued that the key developmental task one needs to accomplish in early adulthood is the skill of intimacy with others. He defined true intimacy as being vulnerable and open and being able to share yourself with another person without losing your own identity. Those who lack the skills or experiences of intimacy often feel isolated and, according to Erikson, can leave early adulthood feeling a sense of meaninglessness as they enter middle age (Erikson, 1961). Thus, it appears that love, attachment, intimacy, and emotional connection with others are important for both our psychological health and the survival of our species.

Although the need for love affects us all, it’s extremely difficult to define. Many researchers have developed various typologies to attempt to pinpoint the key elements involved with love. Robert Sternberg’s triangular theory, Lee’s styles of love, and Aron and Aron’s self-expansion theory are the best known.

**Love**: The subjective feeling of emotional connection with another person, often accompanied by intense desire to be near, care for, protect, or share one’s life with that person.

**Romantic/passionate love**: A type of love that usually exists with newer relationships, where sexual excitement and intrusive thoughts of the person are common.
**STERNBERG’S TRIANGULAR THEORY OF LOVE**

Robert Sternberg (1986; Sternberg & Barnes, 1988) laid out a *triangular theory of love*. In this view, love contains three components: **passion**, **intimacy**, and **commitment**, each of which Sternberg considers essential to love. Relationships can be characterized as high or low on each component. **Passion** includes constant thoughts about the person, strong desire to be near him or her, and sexual excitement. **Intimacy** refers to sharing one’s thoughts and feelings, as well and being vulnerable enough to reveal one’s true self. **Commitment** means that a couple has decided to forego all other liaisons and live in union with one person. They are strongly committed to the welfare of their partner and view life as a shared journey. Whether a relationship has relatively high or low levels of these components determines which type of love they are experiencing. Relationships that are high on passion but low on intimacy and commitment are called **infatuation**. Infatuated couples have a strong physical attraction and are often together but they don’t open up to share their secrets and they don’t decide to stop seeing other people to build a life together. Relationships that are high on commitment and low on intimacy and passion are called **empty love**. **Empty** couples are monogamous and do not seek to dissolve the relationship but they don’t share very much with each other and are not physically intimate. Those who are new to a relationship and have great passion and intimacy but have not yet made a commitment are in the grip of romantic love. **Romantic** couples enjoy spending a lot of time together and may talk all night on the phone when apart, sharing all of their hopes and dreams. They have a fulfilling sexual life but have not progressed to building a committed monogamous life together. A relationship that contains all three components (high intimacy, commitment, and passion) is most likely to be successful, and is considered **consummate love**. Consummately love do things together, feel sexual attraction to each other, share hopes, dreams, and secrets with each other, and they do all they can to stay committed and build a secure life with each other. To see the various combinations of intimacy, commitment, and passion and the resulting types of love, see Table 6.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 6.1</th>
<th>Sternberg’s Types of Love</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intimacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nonlove</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liking</td>
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<td>Infatuated</td>
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<td>Empty love</td>
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<tr>
<td>Romantic</td>
<td>+</td>
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<td>Companionate</td>
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<td>Fatuous love</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consummate</td>
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**NOTE:** + means present; – means absent.

**SOURCE:** Sternberg, 1986.
Sternberg emphasized that relationship partners can have compatible triangular elements or incompatible ones. If one person wants consummate love but another just wants romantic love, this can breed problems. Thus, Sternberg urges people to talk about their relationship expectations as soon as they feel comfortable doing so, instead of assuming a partner wants the same thing they do. This is important because Sternberg has found that we create love stories in our childhoods. These love stories are ideas we store as templates in our minds, regarding what love should be like, and how we see ourselves ending up in a love relationship. Love stories are based on family of origin patterns, personality characteristics, and exposure to books and media. We may not even be aware of some elements of our love stories because we store them in our minds unconsciously and they become implicit. See the Brain Food box for some examples of types of love stories Sternberg discovered after interviewing thousands of people.

**BRAIN FOOD**

**EXAMPLES OF LOVE STORIES**

- **Art:** partner is loved for physical appeal; one person is the admirer and the other is admired.
- **Business:** relationship is a business deal; people are usually in the business together, but sometimes one partner “sells” him- or herself to the other.
- **Democratic government:** power is shared equally; partners keep score.
- **Fantasy:** one expects to be saved by a knight in shining armor or to marry a princess to live happily ever after.
- **Game:** love is a sport; partners are both players or one may be unknowingly sucked into another’s game.
- **Gardening:** relationships take time, nurturing, and care; if properly tended, they will succeed.
- **Police:** one person is in control of keeping the other in line; there is constant surveillance of the “suspect.”
- **Travel:** lovers travel together on a long journey and try to grow along the same path.

*SOURCE: Sternberg, 2007.*

The most common love stories are travel, gardening, and democratic government. Sternberg argues that we should analyze the implicit love stories that underlie our ideas of what love relationships should be like, in order to ensure that our stories are compatible with our partner’s. For example, the travel and gardener love stories are quite compatible but completely different love stories can be a source of conflict. For instance, men often endorse art stories but women are most likely to endorse travel stories. The stories that are related to the lowest level of relationship satisfaction include business, game, and democratic government stories. Disparate stories are not always a source of trouble, however. They can also be used to start a discussion that brings people closer together as they create new stories and try to merge their categories together.
The triangular theory of love is not the only way to think about our love patterns. John Alan Lee has done some interesting research on how people’s relationship styles relate to the quality of their matches.

**LEE’S STYLES OF LOVE**

Lee’s (1973) research uncovered six different *styles of love*, each with more or less focus on commitment and relationship health. He found that the different styles of love relationships can be used to predict the health of the match. Eros, the first love style, is like Sternberg’s *passionate/romantic love* in that people experiencing it want intense intimacy and commitment from their partner. This style can be healthy, especially in the beginning of a match.

In *ludus*, love is taken less seriously. It’s seen as an endeavor undertaken for fun or an enjoyable pursuit a person can share with many different partners. In ludus, love is treated almost like a game. Like Sternberg’s *infatuation*, this approach has little intimacy and no commitment. It thrives on passion. Lee’s research shows this type of love is related to poor relationship quality and unhappiness.

Like Sternberg’s *companionate love*, Lee’s idea of *storge* (pronounced *stor-gee*) love involves maintaining a healthy egalitarian relationship with someone who is your best friend. The world *storge* comes from the Greek idea of “natural affection,” or easy love between family members. Couples experiencing storge are happy and satisfied because they are each concerned with the well-being of the other person and enjoy sharing their lives with each other.

In Lee’s fourth love style, people seek out a rational choice, a logical mate, instead of relying on their passions during mate selection. In this case, *pragma* love develops, often with the help of matchmakers or through a rational deliberation process. The person chosen must logically fit into one’s lifestyle and family configuration. A match must meet several preordained criteria (recall the filter theory of mate selection) in order to be chosen. This is the type of love that occurs in arranged marriages. It’s a sort of practical contentment that does not necessarily include feelings of personal happiness or sexual passion.

In complete contrast with pragma, in mania, the people involved are not logical or rational at all. They tend to be obsessive and insecure. They fear betrayal and are often involved in emotional drama or volatile relationships. They use only their hearts, never their heads. It can lead to knock-down drag-out fights and then amazing make-up sex. But the partners are not happy, satisfied, or fulfilled. This is similar to the anxious/preoccupied/enmeshed attachment style.

Finally, Lee describes agape love, which is similar to Sternberg’s *consummate love*, in that the couple is completely devoted to each other. They care for the very soul of the other person, always wanting to ensure their partner’s welfare. They are selfless in their pursuit of making their partner happy. Agape includes true intimacy, passion, and commitment.

Try to categorize your previous or current love relationship, or the relationship of someone you know, using Lee’s typologies and Sternberg’s triangular theory. Table 6.2 summarizes the typologies and relates them to material you have already learned.

To examine the concept of love typology further, assess your own love attitude in the Self-Assessment box.
If you or someone you know have ever experienced agape or consummate love, you can appreciate why the search for love is so important to most people. Experiencing a truly selfless, balanced love where your partner expands your sense of who you are is a pretty great feeling. Aron and Aron (1986) discuss the idea of a true abiding love in more detail.

**ARON AND ARON’S SELF-EXPANSION THEORY OF LOVE**

In self-expansion theory, Aron and Aron (1986) focus on true love and explain that it often stems from a wish to expand one’s self, to invite another person to be part of one’s self and vice-versa. In self-expansive love, partners fill the gaps and balance out their partner’s traits. The sheer act of loving that person makes each partner rise to become a better version of the self they once were. This view is similar to Lee’s agape love and Sternberg’s consummate love. Agape, consummate, and self-expansion love are thought to be ideal in many Western cultures.

Interestingly, these ideas of selflessness, complete devotion, and a sense of calm security are found in the writings of both Eastern philosophical and Western religious traditions. For example, in Buddhism, true empathy and pure love are thought to be related to spiritual maturity. True love can only develop through spiritual meditation and practice. Buddhists speak of the exalted states of mudita (sympathetic joy) and karuna (compassion). Likewise, the Christian Bible, in the passage many couples include in their marriage vows (I Corinthians 13), states:

> Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. . . . It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

So these feelings of self-expansive, agape, and consummate love are valued in many different types of families, cultures, and religions. Do you think the desire for such love is just part of being human? Or is it more of a social construction? Check out the Focus on My Family box to see how Louise’s ideas of love changed dramatically over her lifetime. What love stories do you think she grew up with? Did her belief in these stories change form or disappear over time?
**SELF-ASSESSMENT**

**LOVE ATTITUDES—SHORT FORM**

Please rate yourself on each item using the following scale: (1) Strongly disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neutral (4) Agree (5) Strongly agree

### Eros Total
1. My partner and I have the right physical “chemistry” between us.
2. I feel that my partner and I were meant for each other.
3. My partner and I really understand each other.
4. My partner fits my ideal standards of physical beauty/handsomeness.

### Ludus Total
1. I believe that what my partner doesn’t know about me won’t hurt him/her.
2. I have sometimes had to keep my partner from finding out about other partners.
3. My partner would get upset if he/she knew of some of the things I’ve done with other people.
4. I enjoy playing the “game of love” with my partner and a number of other partners.

### Storge Total
1. Our love is the best kind because it grew out of a long friendship.
2. Our friendship merged gradually into love over time.
3. Our love is really a deep friendship, not a mysterious, mystical emotion.
4. Our love relationship is the most satisfying because it developed from a good friendship.

### Pragma Total
1. A main consideration in choosing my partner was how he/she would reflect on my family.
2. An important factor in choosing my partner was whether or not he/she would be a good parent.
3. One consideration in choosing my partner was how he/she would reflect on my career.
4. Before getting very involved with my partner, I tried to figure out how compatible his/her hereditary background would be with mine in case we ever had children.

### Mania Total
1. When my partner doesn’t pay attention to me, I feel sick all over.
2. Since I’ve been in love with my partner, I’ve had trouble concentrating on anything else.
3. I cannot relax if I suspect that my partner is with someone else.
4. If my partner ignores me for a while, I sometimes do stupid things to try to get his/her attention back.

### Agape Total
1. I would rather suffer myself than let my partner suffer.
2. I cannot be happy unless I place my partner’s happiness before my own.
3. I am usually willing to sacrifice my own wishes to let my partner achieve his/hers.
4. I would endure all things for the sake of my partner.

Add your scores for each type of love. Those types of love with the highest scores most closely represent your love attitudes. Hendrick and colleagues have found that *eros* is related to relationship satisfaction in couples, while *ludus* is usually an unsatisfying relationship. Another way you can use this assessment is to assess your *real* relationship, then assess your *ideal* relationship, and discuss these differences with your partner in an attempt to build on your relationship strengths and improve weaknesses.

NOTE: Self-Assessments in this textbook are not meant to diagnose, cure, or treat any relationship problems or struggles; they are for informational purposes only, and are meant to spur discussion.


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NOTE: Self-Assessments in this textbook are not meant to diagnose, cure, or treat any relationship problems or struggles; they are for informational purposes only, and are meant to spur discussion.

My first husband and I were madly in love (as much as teenagers know about love). Back then, one could not have a love affair before marriage (bad policy). I was a virgin as “nice girls” didn’t “do it” without a ring on their finger. In the 1940s we got married so we could make love (my mother drummed that into me) and have children. He was going into the navy and then to World War II. Soon I was pregnant, but he shipped out 4 weeks before my delivery, in 1944. The baby and I went home to stay with grandparents until the war was over. The war years were horrible. The baby was the shining light in a mad world. But the war did end, “the boys” came home, and soon another baby was on the way, born in 1948. We bought a house in a new development and thought we had reached suburban paradise. But he had not been feeling well so went to the doctor. He was diagnosed with Hodgkin’s disease with a grim prognosis, which he fought for several months. Unfortunately, he died in 1954, at the age of 31.

I had to start working for the first time in my life, to support the children. I was a widow with two children and my future husband was divorced with two children. After a lot of persuasion, a mutual friend convinced us to go on a date. I was wary but he was handsome, personable, and well dressed, which diminished my anxiety. We had a wonderful evening, talking for hours, telling each other our life stories. We started seeing each other and fell in love. After 2 years, he was offered a job in another city. After discussing it with our children, we decided to get married and start a new life. We both worked full-time and enjoyed parties, vacations, and participating in work functions with clients and coworkers.

My second husband and I are about to celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary. We have been blessed with grandchildren (one of whom lived with us during her teenage years) and great-grandchildren. I grew up during the Great Depression and we lost everything, so had to move in with my grandparents. That experience affected my life perspective . . . there is danger out there, don’t take chances, security is everything . . . the struggles and conflicts in our marriage have been primarily due to this feeling of insecurity. Although he lived through the Depression, my husband experienced it differently. The drive for security was not an issue in his life; he is laid back and lets things slide, while I need order and predictability. Other than that, we are both even-tempered, we respect each other and enjoy being together. We both read a lot, love movies and music, and used to enjoy vacations. Health problems have affected us but perhaps have also drawn us closer. We still love each other and make each other laugh, but I think “happily ever after” is a myth. We are very happy at times, content most of the time, and the few times we are angry with one another are offset by good times. What more could one ask from a half-century-long love affair?
IS LOVE UNIVERSAL?

Discuss the cultural and historical trends around the conceptualization of love.

SOME HISTORICAL TRENDS

Feelings of romantic love exist in virtually every culture around the world. For example, Chinese literature over thousands of years discusses passionate love involving personal choice in one’s mate selection process (Cho & Cross, 1995). Likewise, ancient Egyptian and Hebrew texts discuss passionate love (Hatfield & Rapson, 1996). Plato thought love helped honorable men remain honorable with their male counterparts and that love for a woman was beneath any honorable man (Coontz, 2005). Some Greeks even thought being in love made people insane. In medieval Europe, this “insanity” was thought to be cured by having meaningless sex with someone else. Royal European families often engaged in adultery as they felt real love could not be found in a spouse. And in China, historically, the word love meant a relationship the family did not approve of (Coontz, 2005).

Historically, the institution of marriage was meant to bind two families together for the mutual political or financial benefit of families and communities. Marriage was about political alliance, financial merger, or strategic military maneuvers (Coontz, 2005). While people have always fallen in love, they have not always expected it to occur within the context of marriage. The kingdoms of medieval Europe were strengthened by strategic marriages between cousins across France, Spain, Italy, and England, which kept power centralized for centuries. Written or pictorial records from most civilizations reveal evidence of romantic love, whether it is in the form of songs, poems, stories, or paintings. It’s important to note, however, that even in classic love stories, like that of Antony and Cleopatra, power and control usually played key roles in the love affair (Coontz, 2005). Both ancient Greek and Roman cultures looked down upon men who loved their wives and valued romantic love only between men, who were considered morally superior to women. A man was chastised and considered weak if he exhibited any kind of love toward his wife, and love between strong men was considered the highest love of all. Thus, pre-Christian pagan values led people to envision romantic love very differently from how some of us do today, illustrating the importance of the chronosystem for defining love.

As Christianity spread across the world, a new emphasis on female virginity, piety, and the sanctity of marriage evolved. This led to a system of marriage where romantic love of a partner was considered idolatry, and people were chastised for not putting the love of God first and foremost. While medieval Islam was more tolerant of a husband and wife expressing their love for each other, the love of God was still considered paramount (Coontz, 2005). These types of exosystem influences are very important for most people because religious leaders’ teachings are filtered through parents and teachers and affect our ideas of love. Even today in many cultures, feelings like love are reserved for parents, kin, and God(s).

These historical trends cautioning against emotional love between men and women do not imply, however, that people did not engage in passionate love affairs. To the contrary, as mentioned earlier, European royalty often had love affairs with people outside
Chapter 6

True love was considered impossible with a spouse so the upper classes often revered the love of concubines and male consorts. Sex with one’s spouse was solely for procreation and if the wife did not produce a male heir, mistresses could sometimes legally bear royal sons (Coontz, 2005).

As the philosophies of the Enlightenment period of the 18th century began to spread, individual pleasure and happiness became priorities in the quest for a mate. With the founding of the United States and the doctrine of the “pursuit of happiness,” people felt their own freedom and individual joy were important. This, combined with the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century, led to people socializing with a wide variety of potential mates outside of their village or church circles. City life provided both men and women with many choices. The changes that technological advances brought to courtship and dating rituals (discussed in Chapter 5) also influenced people to take mates for a test drive before they settled down.

Even if the feelings of love are universal, the importance placed on romantic love varies widely across cultures and has changed throughout history. For example, Lithuanians and Russians today don’t consider love to be a necessary precondition to marriage. In fact, they view love as a romanticized fairytale that is not realistic and is only temporary (de Munck, Korotayev, de Munck, & Khaltourina, 2011). Today, people from Western middle-class backgrounds typically want to marry for love. With individual freedom ensconced in society, women were more likely to have the same power as men to choose a mate of their own liking. With freedom and choice often comes a push toward autonomy. Historically, many politicians, philosophers, and religious leaders feared the new focus on individual choice because they felt it would lead to women wanting to be equal to men in power, employment, and family clout. If they gave women the same rights as men to make choices, they would be admitting women had rational decision-making power,
which could alter the balance of society. Remember that structural-functionalist theory posits that each part of society plays a key role in maintaining the structure of society as it “should” be. This new trend of marriage for love threatened to undermine the traditional power structures in our society (Coontz, 2011). Let’s explore gender and love in a little more depth.

**GENDER ISSUES**

If women could choose their husbands for love, they could also choose divorce if that love faltered. Thus, the movement toward personal happiness eventually led to the loosening of divorce laws. As the focus on love increased, the rates of divorce increased in comparison to previous generations (Coontz, 2011). With views of love, sex, and marriage changing, even as early as the late 18th century, many more women were getting pregnant without being married. With less responsibility on men to marry their pregnant partners, some women ended up working wherever they could to support their children, even turning to prostitution. This rise in unwed motherhood seemed to confirm the fears of the larger society in that it appeared that our new focus on individual pleasure and love could destroy the traditional family as we knew it (Coontz, 2011).

For the middle and upper classes in the 19th century, the Victorian ideal of feminized love evolved, where women did most of the loving and men avoided emotional commitment. Women and men were forced to play determined and proscribed roles in the family (Cancian, 1987). Men were expected to be emotionally detached from their wives and children, to be out and about living in the larger society. They had to do all the worrying about finances and deal stoically with business problems or political strife. Men were under intense pressure to bear male heirs so even if they loved their wives, a lack of boys in the family could mean that men took mistresses or divorced their wives. Women were expected to love their children, be naturally good at intimacy, and maintain kin and extended community relationships. They were expected to dress well and be the epitome of manners, grace, and style. While sex was their duty, intimacy with their husbands was not expected.

In many cultures around the world today, women are considered to be the intimacy “experts” (Tavris, 1992). While women used to be considered emotional, irrational, and lovesick, traits that were seen as deficits, today these same traits are often interpreted as the strengths that make women better at love, and more sensitive and caring. What do you think? Are women more able to love and be loved? If so, is this innate or socially constructed? Perhaps some of what you learned about gender in Chapter 3 can help you answer these questions.

**HOW MEN AND WOMEN EXPRESS LOVE**

One thing that is commonly found in Western cultures is that men show their love differently than women do. This also leads to different expectations for each gender. Men tend to think that love means “action.” Doing nice things for their mates, such as washing the car, cleaning the house, or taking care of some unpaid bills, shows their love through
action. However, women often want men to express their love through talking about their feelings and processing the relationship in verbally intimate terms (Schoenfeld, Bredow, & Huston, 2012; Tavris, 1992). Men often report that they don’t know what women want when their partners constantly question their love or commitment. They argue that if they didn’t love her, they wouldn’t stick around. Statements like “I do so much for her yet she questions my love because I’m not a touchy-feely person” are common. Women, on the other hand, often make statements like “I know he loves me but sometimes I’d like to hear him say it to me and share his feelings about our relationship.” These differences in perceptions can be seen even in childhood. Boys tend to talk about their feelings only when they are side by side with a friend, doing something together like playing ball or building something. They also reveal their feelings in a cloaked manner, through joking and teasing.

Teasing is often the main way in which grown men show their affection for their friends as well. Women would be offended if their friends said some of the things men’s friends say to them. But for men, being open, accepting, and comfortable with a friend, allows one to poke fun at the other. This doesn’t mean they desire intimacy less, however. In fact, boys and men both want to share their feelings with friends and feel true intimacy with other boys and men. Unfortunately, the intimate friendships of boyhood have often disappeared by adolescence (Way, 2013). Teasing may be one way to reveal one’s flaws or fears indirectly because as boys get older, they often fear expressing themselves in “girly” or “gay” ways and work hard to maintain their masculinity (Oransky & Marecek, 2009). Girls, on the other hand, prefer to reveal their deep insecurities and vulnerabilities to their girlfriends through intimate sharing, often through sworn confidences.

Grown women like to talk just to be heard by their friends. This act in itself relieves stress. Women talk to solve problems, to have their feelings confirmed, and to share secrets with their friends. Men often feel intimate connections to their partners by just being in the same room doing something together. Women want to engage in both “big talk” and “small talk” about key issues in their lives and the daily events that occurred (Tavris, 1992), but men often don’t feel the need to delve deeply into issues. Keep in mind, however, as discussed in Chapter 3, that men and women are actually more similar than different. Thus, rates of emotional disclosure, teasing, intimacy, and the sharing of experiences may show average differences between the sexes, but the distributions of such traits and behaviors run along continua that show wide variability within each sex (Reis & Carothers, 2014). As gender roles continue to evolve, we may see men and women expressing their love in increasingly similar ways.
ANDROGYNOUS LOVE

For many people, gender role expectations have been loosening in recent generations. With the evolution of the suffragette movement and changing gender mores of the 1920s, a more androgynous love based on intimacy in both partners, where sex, love, and intimacy were combined in one relationship, began to alter people’s expectations. The rise in divorce in the 1920s is often attributed to women’s new sought-after power, individuality, and rights, their attempts to free themselves from social constraints and seek relationship freedom (Cancian, 1987). Marriage became a form of self-fulfillment, no longer a duty for many. Androgynous gender roles (both partners exhibiting masculine and feminine traits) became more normalized. Keep in mind, though, that these androgynous roles were far from normative for most families, as most women were still economically dependent on men. Role changes did allow for many men and women to be caring, understanding, and even sexually fulfilled. However, women were still responsible for maintaining the love and keeping husbands interested, attracted to their beauty, well-fed, and comfortable. And men were still expected to wear the rigid mask of masculinity, not allowing people to see their stress, worry, or fears of failure.

For working-class couples and poor families, survival was still more of an issue in their relationships than love was, and most women worked outside the home. Even in the 1970s, when women’s liberation was sought by many and women expected others to respect their minds, poor women and more conservative or religious women still believed in SNAF ideals. This trend even exists today, where traditional family values are often pitted against women’s freedom to choose, work, and have power over their lives, negotiating their own paths (Coltrane, 2004; Miller, Sassler, & Kusi-Appouh, 2011). Thus, the trend toward true androgyny in love relationships is still growing but not universal (Eaton & Rose, 2011; Robnett & Leaper, 2013).

In general, however, in Western cultures, love today is considered to be the responsibility of both men and women; each person is expected to sacrifice for his or her partner. Communication between partners is expected; intimacy is desired. Both men and women are happier when their partners take the time to really get to know them, to understand their feelings, and when they are responsive to their partners’ emotional expressions (Coltrane, 1998a). When men and women allow their partners to express how they feel and they allow themselves to be influenced by their partners at the same level, feelings of love increase. It’s important to remember that these trends of love, communication, and commitment are not true of all cultures either historically or today. Remember that even today many cultures around the world eschew the value of matches based on love. They feel that personal passions and love are irrational and no reasonable basis for forming a marriage bond. As discussed earlier, romantic love is often seen as interfering with a person’s responsibility to their parents, extended kin, God, and community. It’s a selfish pursuit, which can bring the downfall of traditional families and values. In support of this idea, it is true that as individualism increases, so does divorce. As socioeconomic status increases in communities, so do the desires for love, personal choice, and the freedom to divorce if desired.

MODERN IDEAS

In modern American culture, we are socialized to believe that we should lock eyes with someone, feel instant passion, fall into bed with each other, and have multiple simultaneous

Androgynous love: The modern idea that both men and women should work on tenderness, empathy, and expressing their love to each other (in contrast to the idea that women are responsible for maintaining love).
orgasms (Lewis et al., 2000). Surveys from 50 years ago show that people in the United States wanted to get married in order to have children. Today people want to get married for love. They want a perfect match, a soulmate to counterbalance their own weaknesses, bring out their strengths, and provide them with unconditional love. We feel we can’t possibly stay in a relationship unless we are blissfully happy (Shulman, 2004). This viewpoint downplays the importance of giving to others when in a love relationship, being unselfish, and putting another’s needs ahead of one’s own.

Many Western industrialized cultures encourage such selfishness and a focus on individual concerns. With value placed on wealth, power, youth, and sex, modern American culture is based on consumption and materialism. Egocentric self-indulgence is one of the byproducts of this culture. We fail to realize that good, healthy relationships can be simply moderately happy and that even moderate happiness may require lots of work.

Most of this chapter focuses on love between two people, usually referring to the desire for a “soulmate.” However, more and more people are questioning this traditional idea, that there can only be one partner with whom we spend our lives. They feel that if the goal is to be honest and to find partners that truly make us happy, it may require admitting that everything we want probably won’t be found in one partner alone. While having more than one special love partner is nothing new historically or culturally speaking, it’s becoming more recognized as a legitimate relationship structure in the Western world.

POLYAMORY

In many Western cultures, people believe in finding one true love who will meet their every need. That’s a lot of pressure to put on one person. Do you think you could fulfill every single need—emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual—of another human being? Many people question the idea of monogamy and do not think humans are meant to be monogamous, or practice “monoamory.” In fact, the majority of people around the world do not think so. As we learned in Chapter 3, many cultures practice some form of polygamy. But beyond polygamy, polyamory, loving more than one person, is gaining in popularity in heterosexual and gay/lesbian/bisexual relationships (Hernandez, 2006).

Most of us were raised to believe we can only romantically love one person at a time. Sexual relationships are considered exclusive to a committed couple, and “infidelity” is frowned upon by most people. We are even opposed to “emotional infidelity” in the form of close, intimate friendships our partners form at work or on the Internet. If we all believe in monogamy, it’s interesting to note that the number of women who meet men and have affairs in the workplace is now equal to the number of men (Teich, 2006). Many people today also report falling madly in love with someone on the Internet, dreaming of that person as a potentially perfect mate who would make up for their “real” partner’s flaws. In addition, Teich (2006) discusses the Internet as being a tool for rekindling old romances. Social networking sites like Facebook allow people to find lost loves and create a fantasy space for reminiscing and recreating old desires. Is this wrong? If we flirt, share our deepest secrets and desires, socialize, and talk with people at work or electronically but never have sexual relations with them, is it cheating?
People in polyamorous relationships report that having more than one partner actually can be quite beneficial. There is always another ear to listen, a person to mediate conflicts, someone to provide a different, unique sexual experience, a third (or fourth) income to support the household and children, more people to share the burdens of housework and bills, and so on (Mitchell, Bartholomew, & Cobb, 2014). Of course, there are also complications. The partners have to be very mature, have good communication styles, lack jealousy, and have a willingness to avoid “keeping score” by trying to make each relationship exactly equal in time spent together, conversations held, or sexual liaisons.

To make a polyamorous relationship (or any relationship) succeed, the partners need to talk to each other constructively, be creative in handling problems, make crucial decisions together, have a satisfying sex life, make compromises, and share feelings and ideas even while disagreeing (Heiman et al., 2011).

While polyamory may be seen as a relatively new phenomenon in the Western world, even in 1950s America “wife swapping” was not an uncommon pastime. Upper-class people would have sexual relations with their friends’ spouses yet maintain their marriages. In the 1970s there was “swinging,” where committed partners would allow their mates to have sexual relations with relative strangers at swingers’ parties (Labriola, 2006). These liaisons were more about sex than love, but they raise the question of whether monogamy should be expected. Interestingly, many countries in the Middle East and Africa allow polygamy, where one husband marries several wives. What do you think? Should a committed love relationship mean that we should only have sex with that one person for the rest of our lives? Do you think humans are supposed to be monogamous, or is this practice a social construction? See how you feel about the different types of polyamorous unions that exist.

Schroeder (2008) talks about different polyamorous family configurations:

- **primary/secondary structure**—a couple is committed to each other and any other liaisons are considered secondary, meaning they can never interfere with or join the first relationship.
- **multiple primary partners structure**—there can be polyfidelity in this structure, or group marriage/partnership, where all partners involved are married or committed to each other but no one strays outside of that group.
- **open model structure**—in this structure, the key multiple primary partners are committed to each other but all agree that other sexual or love relationships would be acceptable.

In one of the only studies on the relationship and identity dynamics in polyamorous relationships, Manley, Diamond, and van Anders (2015) found that people in polyamorous relationships did not define their sexual orientation as strictly gay or strictly straight. They defined themselves in fluid and nontraditional ways. Also, polyamorous women shifted their ratings of attraction to one or both sexes over time. Their sexual attractions were much more fluid over time than those of polyamorous men or monogamous men or women.

Research is only beginning to recognize polyamorous unions so we do not know a lot about what makes these unions work or dissolve. Theorists and therapists suggest that we must begin to examine intersectional identity factors as well as power structures in these
relationships. For example, Kless (2014) reports that polyamory is much more accepted in middle- and upper-class homes and that people who openly practice polyamory typically live in privileged communities. Moreover, power dynamics within such relationships may vary by the gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and the social backgrounds of the participants. Some partners may wield more power and privilege at home and some families may have more power and privilege due to their wealth or social status in more or less progressive communities (Jordan, Grogan, Muruthi & Bermudez, 2016).

With more and more media reports emerging in the past couple of years documenting polyamorous families, they are becoming more comfortable “outing” themselves. With the changes in gender roles, laws regarding same-sex marriages, and declining SNAF expectations, we may eventually see less emphasis placed on monogamy and the potentially unrealistic expectations we often hold for our monogamous partners to fulfill all of our needs. What do you think? Is polyamory inherently bad, corrupt, or immoral? Or is this trend just another example of the natural evolution away from strict societal control over our love lives? And what do you make of the fact that polyamory in the form of polygamy is so commonly practiced around the world? What cultural beliefs do you think would increase the rates of polyamory? Regardless of how many partners we have, our history, gender, or culture, we all share common biological functioning when it comes to love.

BIOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF LOVE

6.3 Explain the basic biochemistry underlying love relationships over time.

Charles Darwin, in his 1872 publication, *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals*, argued that emotions have adaptive value and that our emotional expressions serve to communicate our needs to others in order to help us survive.

We now know that hormones like adrenalin raise our alert attention to our surroundings when we face threats to our survival. For example, when mammal infants are separated from their mothers, they often become extremely alert and conduct a detailed search for their mothers’ whereabouts. Experimental studies show that infant animals show an increase in the stress hormone cortisol upon maternal separation. Likewise, humans often stay up all night, wide awake, if they break up with a loved one or a loved one dies. Nonhuman and human animals alike often go through similar increases in stress chemicals when they experience the loss of a loved one. For example, prairie voles (small rodents) show increases in blood plasma levels of oxytocin when socially isolated, suggesting that this “bonding” chemical urges them to seek out others to bond with (Bales et al., 2007).

In both nonhuman and human animals, separation from loved ones often leads to initial protest and disbelief reactions. A human may appear dazed and confused, or act
Love as if everything is fine. Eventually, it’s not uncommon for both animals and humans to show signs of despair, which is characterized by lethargy, lack of sleep, appetite reduction, and so on. For example, some animal babies, when they eventually stop searching for lost caregivers, show a decrease in blood pressure, an irregular heartbeat, lowered stress hormone levels in their blood, and immune system shutdown (Hofer, 1987). When human children are severely neglected or deprived of caregiving, they often stop growing, their brains develop abnormally, they develop illnesses, and they even die (Nelson, Furtado, Fox, & Zeanah, 2009). Loneliness in adults is related to higher levels of heart disease and lower immune functioning (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001). Most of you have probably heard stories of elders who die shortly after their spouse does. This is often attributed to dying of a “broken heart.”

Human women engaged in troubled relationships show evidence of an increase in oxytocin levels. In contrast, men in those same troubled relationships show an increase in vasopressin, a hormone that has been linked to male pair-bonding behavior. Thus, it appears with this preliminary research that the bonding hormones oxytocin and vasopressin can be biomarkers of distressed relationships and may influence people to seek closeness or bonds with others (De Boer, Van Buel, & Ter Horst, 2012; Taylor, Saphire-Bernstein, & Seeman, 2009). Lewis and colleagues (2000) state that “a relationship is a physiological process” (p. 81). The research results from animal and human studies of separation, loss, and troubled relationships support this observation.

As we develop through the lifespan, we must be taught how to cope with emotional losses. If we don’t have good role models for this, we may take drugs to change our brain chemistry when faced with emotional pain or loss. Drugs like Prozac raise serotonin levels in the brain, reducing depressive feelings and making losses not hurt so badly (Grady et al., 2013; Nord, Finnema, Halldin, & Farde, 2013). However, widespread treatment of loss with medication leads to a situation in which millions of medicated people are not learning how to cope with losses and disappointments. A medicated society may eventually become numb and unable to truly love, or even feel for that matter. Fisher and Thomson (2007) found that serotonin-increasing antidepressants block emotions, including the euphoria of new relationships. They can also inhibit sexual arousal and the ability to have an orgasm. While psychotropic medications are necessary in some cases, to help people struggling with mental illnesses like serious clinical depression, many other people need help learning how to retune their brains and regulate the emotion centers in order to face the world of human relationships in a healthy manner (Fisher & Thomson, 2007).

THE BRAIN AND RELATIONSHIPS

Love can be a powerful connection between two people, leading to intimacy, happiness, and a sense of personal well-being. However, sometimes we don’t engage in healthy forms of love and we end up being hurt, depressed, or hopeless about finding love again. It’s important to understand a little bit about how our brain functions so that we can more fully grasp how these social experiences start to influence the way we process information in the environment. Conversely, it’s also important to recognize that the way we think in turn affects our social experiences.
Lewis and fellow researchers (2000) discuss the facets of the human triune brain, the idea that the brain has three key levels or structures. The first level is the brain stem, sometimes called the reptilian brain, due to its location in the lower or more primitive parts of the brain that control our survival functions (such as heart rate and startle response).

The second, more sophisticated part of the brain is the limbic brain, the emotion center, which stimulates touching, playing, caring for babies, bonding to others, distress calls upon separation, and so on. The limbic system tries to integrate internal feelings with experiences of the external world. Most families naturally shape their children’s limbic systems into smooth information processors that process friendships and romantic relationships in balanced, constructive ways. Parents teach children to “use their words” to express feelings, instead of hitting others. They hug their crying teenager who just got dumped by a first love and ask them to talk about how they feel. They allow their children’s limbic systems to process emotions fully. By talking about feelings and helping them solve problems, limbic systems become balanced in a way that helps children learn how to function in the social worlds of their micro- and mesosystems. If we don’t take care of the limbic brains of children or cannot take care of our own as adults, we may create societies of people who cannot regulate their emotions or function socially (Marganska, Gallagher, & Miranda, 2013; Perry, 2004).

Some people have not had adequate experiences with limbic regulation in their families of origin. They may not have learned how to reflect on their feelings, process them, or come up with healthy solutions for heartbreak or relational stress. They may try other ways to balance out the strong feelings taking place in their limbic systems, such as taking drugs or drinking alcohol. When we take drugs like opiates (morphine, heroin, and opium), we numb our physical and emotional pain and throw off the fine-tuned chemistry of our natural brains. Introducing artificial chemicals in the form of drugs and alcohol can distort the brain’s functioning. For example, rat pups given just enough opium to numb their limbic system no longer cry for their mothers upon separation (Carden & Hofer, 1990).

When children have had severe disruptions in their initial love relationships, such as in the case of parental death, abandonment, abuse, or mental illness, they may develop strategies besides drug or alcohol consumption to numb the pain of loneliness. Cutting, making superficial wounds on the body with razor blades, paper clips, or knives, and other forms of self-mutilation often serve as such coping mechanisms (Sandman, 2009). When a person self-mutilates, endogenous opiates, naturally occurring pain-relieving neurochemicals, are released in the brain and dull the greater emotional pain people are experiencing in their lives. Most people who cut are emotionally vulnerable and take losses and disappointments extremely hard, often due to a lifetime history of disrupted attachments to caregivers (Bifulco et al., 2014; van der Kolk, Perry, & Herman, 1991).

Just as people in less healthy family environments learn how to raise endogenous opiates by negative strategies like cutting, many people also figure out how to increase a sense of personal well-being in positive ways that release endogenous opiates, such as by exercising, meditating, and engaging in prayer (Esch & Stefano, 2007; Wachholtz, Pearce, & Koenig, 2008). One of the most common ways we increase these feel-good chemicals in our families is through warm human contact, hugs, kisses, and sharing good times together.
The third, most sophisticated, and most recently evolved portion of the brain is the **neocortex**. This bark-like covering over the surface of the brain's two hemispheres helps us to think logically and analytically. Its evolution allowed for the development of one of the most fundamental capacities that separates humans from other animals: language. We use language to communicate about what the limbic brain feels. When we have a supportive, close family, the neocortex allows us to develop a vocabulary that mirrors a calm, balanced limbic brain. A mother whose child did something naughty might feel disappointed but when she sees that her child is also disappointed in himself, might say, “I will always love you, no matter what.” Or a husband might look at his wife coaching their child’s soccer game and after the game, hug her and express his pride by saying, “You’re an amazing coach; our daughter is lucky!” Though powerful in its own right, the neocortex, or reasoning center, cannot necessarily override illogical or passionate feelings. The logical brain cannot easily heal a wounded limbic brain. For example, we often know a relationship is bad for us, yet we can’t stop ourselves from seeing the person. And children who are abused or violated by their attachment figures still cry when separated from them.

The three parts of the triune brain often work in concert, but at certain times, they can be in conflict with each other. For example, teenagers have a well-developed limbic brain but an underdeveloped neocortex. This makes them passionate, emotional, and risk taking. But they often fail to think about the consequences of their actions or analyze the reasons for why they do things (Giedd, 2004). Even for adults, love is probably not centered in the rational brain. The neocortex can lead us to analyze a loved one ad infinitum, rationalize bad or hurtful behavior, or ruminate about conflicts over and over and over again. It certainly doesn’t help us many times when we’re in a tough spot regarding the object of our affections.

In order to help heal an emotionally bruised limbic brain, one that has had repeated experiences with pain and loss, sometimes it takes a long process of relearning what love is. We need to learn that love does not have to be punishing or intensely painful. If that has been our experience, though, it takes a lot of work to construct a new emotional life. We need to dig deep to truly understand our feelings. We must ask ourselves constantly, “What am I feeling and why? What is the true nature of my emotional life?” When we can calm and regulate our limbic system, then we can stabilize the limbic system and help it to work more effectively in concert with the neocortex (Lewis et al., 2000), creating a finely tuned brain. The passion of a new relationship will get us started on this task, but we must advance beyond romance to bathe the brain with the chemicals of a calm, nurturing love, one that also makes rational sense considering our current life circumstances. Like most behaviors, loving interactions result from a complex interaction between our genes, neurochemistry, and experience.

**NEUROCHEMISTRY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOVE**

Many personality traits, which are largely influenced by our genes, may affect our functioning in love relationships. People who are extroverted, emotionally stable, sociable, and understand both their own and other people’s emotions well tend to have better luck with love (Wachs, 2000). They understand their own emotions and the feelings of others. They can solve problems constructively rather than destructively. In contrast,
research shows that risk-takers (people who may drive drunk, steal, or have unprotected sex) tend to be more irritable, unable to handle frustration, and highly angry. Some evidence indicates these people have higher than average levels of testosterone (Wachs, 2000). You may not be surprised to learn that these testosterone-linked traits are found more often in men. But even within females there is wide variation in testosterone levels. Research also shows that people with lower than average levels of estrogen (including women) have more emotional ups and downs while higher than average estrogen levels are related to more emotional stability and happiness (Wharton, Gleason, Olson, Carlsson, & Asthana, 2012). These correlations suggest that natural individual differences in the genetic expression of traits as well as hormone levels can affect our experiences in relationships (Glover et al., 2012).

To examine changes in chemical reactions over the course of relationship development, let’s start with the very beginning. One of the common things we desire in a love relationship is to kiss the person who stimulates our passion.

**KISSING**

Famous classicist Donald Lateiner (2009) found that kissing was practiced in ancient Greece and Rome, and studies across cultures show that at least 90% of people kiss (Fisher, 1998). Some anthropologists believe this oft-cited 90% estimate is too high, though. For example, one study found that only 46% of the cultures examined engaged in romantic kissing, and that the practice was more common in highly developed cultures (Jankowiak, Volsche, & Garcia, 2015). However, other research suggests that even if there’s no formal kissing going on, almost all cultures have something similar, where people get really close to another person and perform intimate acts, such as licking them, nibbling their faces, rubbing their noses, sniffing each other, or licking their hands (Kirshenbaum, 2011).

The study of kissing is called **philematology** and more and more researchers are becoming interested in this phenomenon. Kissing may have evolved from our ancestors sniffing other people’s faces to decide if they were healthy. Kissing allows for an exchange of bacteria that might build up our immune systems (Kirshenbaum, 2011). During a kiss, all of our senses become involved in assessing the other person. We smell them, taste them, see them, and feel them. Airborne chemicals called pheromones tell us whether the person is desirable or not. In our evolutionary past, this may have helped us determine the genetic suitability of a potential mate.

Primatologists note that human lips have evolved to resemble other primates’ engorged genitals in that they are outside of our bodies, red, fleshy, and puckered. Lips are also packed with touch receptors that shoot signals right up to the somatosensory cortex of our brains. When we engage in prolonged kissing bouts, our blood pressure declines, stress hormones decrease, and serum cholesterol levels are reduced (Floyd et al., 2009). Believe it or not, in one experimental study they found that when couples were instructed to kiss for 30 minutes, the partner who suffered from allergies no longer had allergic reactions to things like pet dander (Floyd et al., 2009)! However, don’t forget that we can also contract dangerous viruses like herpes, the flu, and mononucleosis from kissing (Floyd et al., 2009).

**Philematology:** The scientific study of kissing.
Hill, Wilson, and Lebovitz (2009) found that at the same time that stress hormones like cortisol dramatically decrease in circulation during kissing sessions, levels of oxytocin increase, a combination that is linked to a relaxed body and psychological sense of euphoria and bonding. As mentioned earlier, oxytocin has been found in animals to increase pair bonding. There are differences, however, between women’s and men’s responses to kissing. Women’s oxytocin levels do not increase like men’s do during kissing sessions unless the atmosphere is viewed as romantic (Hill et al., 2009). Also, women view kissing as an intimate act in itself while men see it as foreplay to sex. In contrast to women, men prefer wetter, juicier kisses. Scientists have found that testosterone is exchanged with one’s partner through saliva, perhaps suggesting a mechanism behind the increase in sex drive after kissing (Fisher, 1998). More research is needed on this phenomenon but these preliminary findings suggest that people who are attracted to each other and kiss will experience an elevation of hormones, which increases the chances of emotional bonding, sexual activity, and potentially the development of a romantic relationship.

**RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

Once we’ve built a more committed relationship, we begin to give ourselves to another person and share a more intimate type of love. We can begin to experience **limbic coregulation**, which means that our bodily rhythms become synchronized with each other. We can help each other develop our emotional regulation abilities. Lewis and colleagues (2000) state that we can “remodel the emotional parts of the people we love” (p. 144). When we live with others in an intimate relationship, our hormonal cycles and diurnal rhythms related to sleep, hunger, and sex become more synchronized. As a consequence, we often find it difficult to sleep when the other person is gone, and our eating and regular activities feel “discombobulated.”

The ways we talk, share, and experience emotional situations affect our partner’s brain functioning. Anthropologist Helen Fisher used MRI scans to record the brain activity of people newly in love while they looked at a picture of their loved one (Fisher et al., 2002). Fisher and her colleagues found that a high level of activity occurred in the ventral tegmental area of the caudate nucleus, which is the reward center of the brain. This means that the reward center of the brain lit up, as if the loved one’s photo provided the brain with a chemical reward. This area of the brain is rich with dopamine (the pleasure neurotransmitter) receptors, which help stimulate energy level, exhilaration, attention, and motivation to receive more rewards. The same feeling is engendered when a person attempts a novel and exciting activity like skydiving or riding a rollercoaster. Meta-analytical examinations across dozens of studies support the idea that dopaminergic pathways as well as those areas related to processing oxytocin are involved in experiencing passionate love (Ortigue, Bianchi-Demicheli, Patel, Frum, & Lewis, 2010).

Remember, however, that these neuroscience studies simply show correlations between a behavior and a brain process. We cannot conclude that the chemical or brain region being studied is the cause of a certain behavior or vice versa. In addition, not every participant in brain research shows the same chemical or anatomical profile. Furthermore, each brain region and neurotransmitter is involved in countless human thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, so finding that they are associated with love may not mean what we think it means.
One example of the multiple roles neurotransmitters can play involves serotonin. You may know that serotonin affects mood, as it is altered when one takes antidepressants. People who are depressed tend to have lower levels of serotonin and people who are very happy have higher levels. People who are in love evidence increased serotonin levels while at the same time dopamine is also bathing the brain. This may partially explain why, when we are in love, we can become a euphoric, dreamy, happy mess. This research is rapidly evolving and more recent work suggests there may actually be gender differences in this effect, with men in love showing lower serotonin levels and women in love showing elevated levels. People of both sexes experience obsessive thinking about their beloved, but this was associated with completely different serotonin responses (Langeslag, van der Veen, & Fekkes, 2012).

As you might suspect from these brain findings, the brain high on love is certainly not the best one for making rational decisions. Another intriguing finding related to irrational thinking is that while long-term love may be related to increased serotonin levels, brand new love may actually decrease the same chemical, leading to emotional instability. The How Would You Measure That? box explores how brand new love might change our brain functioning.

Think a little bit more deeply about the idea of people being engaged in a mutually influential physiological partnership. Then take a look at this poem, written in 1921, by the Pulitzer Prize–winning poet Edna St. Vincent Millay. What do you think she's trying to tell us about love? How does her message resonate with you, after learning more about the neurochemistry of love?

I shall forget you presently, my dear,
So make the most of this, your little day,
Your little month, your little half a year,
Ere I forget, or die, or move away,
And we are done forever; by and by
I shall forget you, as I said, but now
If you entreat me with your loveliest lie
I will protect you with my favorite vow.
I would indeed that love were longer-lived,
And oaths were not so brittle as they are,
But so it is, and nature has contrived
To struggle on without a break thus far,—
Whether or not we find what we are seeking
Is idle, biologically speaking, (as cited in Milford, 2002, p. xiii)
Millay speaks to the complex and often conflicting roles played by our brain stem, our limbic system, and our more sophisticated neocortex understanding of love and long-term relationships. She may not have realized it, but she painted a vivid picture of the triune brain and how the limbic system may not always work synergistically with the neocortex. Our reptilian biological urges lead us in one direction, but our neocortical thoughts can take us elsewhere, all depending on the social context. Attachments are complicated.

**HOW WOULD YOU MEASURE THAT?**

Because both romantic love and mental illness have been linked to the serotonin transporter process in the brain, Marazziti and fellow researchers (1999) decided to examine the neurochemistry of people in love in comparison to those diagnosed with a serotonin-related mental illness, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). The authors reasoned that new love and OCD seem to share similar “symptoms,” like obsessive thoughts that won’t go away. Moreover, OCD is often successfully treated with medications that increase the amount of serotonin available in the synapses of the brain (for example, Prozac, which inhibits the reuptake of serotonin to increase amounts available for use in the brain). The authors examined 20 participants in their early 20s who had “fallen in love” within the past 6 months. The lovers reported thinking about their new partner at least 4 hours per day. The researchers also recruited 20 patients of about the same age who had been diagnosed with OCD, but had not taken serotonergic drugs. These two groups were compared to a healthy control group. The independent variable in this study was “group membership,” consisting of three levels (love group, OCD group, and control group). The dependent variable measured was the level of serotonin transporter in the blood.

Participants had their blood collected early in the morning after fasting. Researchers assessed platelet-rich plasma for the density of serotonin transporters in a chemical formulation called H-paroxetine binding parameters or H-Par. It was hypothesized that those with OCD and those in love would have a lower density of H-Par, which means less serotonin available in the brain. Marazziti and colleagues (1999) found clear support for their hypothesis. The people who were in love were indistinguishable from those suffering from OCD. Moreover, both the people in the OCD group and the love group had significantly less dense H-Par binding sites than the people in the control group.

The difference amounted to people in the control group having double the amount of serotonin circulating in their brains than either people in love or those with OCD.

When those in love were tested again 12 to 18 months later (presumably when the brain had moved on to companionate love chemicals or the couple had broken up), their brains were the same as the brains of people in the control group in the original study. Similarly, people with OCD who had been successfully treated showed an increase in H-Par binding site density (to normal levels) in the same way the individuals in companionate love did at the long-term follow-up. The authors argue that young love induces a state of abnormality in the brain. We obsess over the person, and as we all know, love songs, poems, and irrational behavior follow.

It’s important to note that the serotonin system also plays a role in appetite, body heat regulation, sleep patterns, perception of pain, circadian rhythms, impulsivity, and anxiety, all of which can play a role in both love and mental illness. This might suggest that, indeed, love makes you “crazy.” If that is the case, is love really something upon which we should base our most serious and enduring life decisions?
THE SOCIAL CONTEXTS OF LOVE

6.4 Discuss the interpersonal and social contexts of love and related therapeutic procedures for improving love relationships.

In her poem, Millay suggests that love is fleeting and that it doesn’t matter if we seek or find love because, evolutionarily speaking, all that matters is biological reproduction. In the grand scheme of things, that may be true. But while we are here on earth with a cerebral cortex that allows us to contemplate, ruminate, analyze, hypothesize, and predict outcomes, love can, indeed, be a very real entity that affects our daily lives. And these effects can begin before we're even aware of what relationships are all about.

BABY LOVE

Freudians thought that babies loved their mothers because mothers ensured their survival through feeding. In the 1950s and 1960s, Harry Harlow (1962), a great primatologist, sought to test this idea as well as to try to discover the nature of mother love. In one key study, when baby rhesus monkeys were raised with a wire mesh “mother” who fed them with a bottle placed through the mesh, the babies actually never attached emotionally to her. However, they clung to a terry cloth “mother” (a wire model wrapped in soft cloth) for the majority of the day; they attached to her emotionally and “loved” her. When scary objects were placed in their cages, they ran to the cloth mother, never to the wire mother; and when they hugged her, they visibly relaxed. The baby monkeys even worked up the nerve to hiss and yell at the feared object (usually a giant plastic insect or a menacing robot) after being “comforted” by their cloth mother. The cloth and wire mothers were heated to the same temperature so these results could not be explained by warmth. These studies showed that babies attach to their mothers to find comfort, touch, and protection, regardless of whether or not she feeds them. Harlow’s studies revolutionized our thinking about what “love” is. It’s an emotion that allows us to feel safe and secure, and gives us the desire to physically reach out to others who can comfort us in a time of need.

While these results may not be directly comparable to the attachments of humans, human infants do use their caregivers as “secure bases” from which to explore the world around them (Bowlby, 1988). If their caregivers raise them with love, warmth, and caring, infants develop a sense of security about relationships and can venture out into the world with courage. It’s a common sight on playgrounds to see small children looking back to their parents as they venture out into the wild world of a jungle gym teeming with loud, strange children. If they fall down or someone takes their pail and shovel, they immediately run back to their secure base, just like the monkeys in Harlow’s studies ran back to their comforting cloth mothers. The converse is also true. Research suggests that children who spend their early years in orphanages where their physical needs are met, but they have no consistent attachment figure, experience prolonged periods of social and emotional dysfunction (Wismer-Fries, Shirtcliff, & Pollak, 2008). Thus what happens in our early microsystems can have a lasting impact.

Wismer-Fries and colleagues (2008) found that when orphans who spent their earlier years in stark Romanian orphanages were adopted into loving homes with good
parents, they still had trouble functioning. When researchers had the families come into the lab and engage in attachment behaviors (having the child sit in the parent’s lap, tickling, playing pat-a-cake, and so on), the children who had been in orphanages experienced sharp spikes in cortisol, the stress hormone. This indicates that they experienced the attachment games as threatening stimuli. This pattern was not found in control group children, and even more interesting, the adopted children did not experience cortisol increases when engaging in the same sorts of games with strangers (research assistants). Thus, the children who experienced early attachment disruption continued to exhibit high alarm-state (fight or flight) hormonal patterns even years after they had been adopted into safe homes. They did not experience close physical contact as comforting. These results suggest that there are early sensitive periods that are difficult to reclaim if our emotional needs are not met in infancy and toddlerhood (Wismer-Fries et al., 2008).

Recall that attachment theory (Bowlby, 1980) posits that we develop internal working models that reflect our views of ourselves, our views of other people, and our views of relationships in general. Parents raise children to develop these internal working models, or prototypes, of relationships. These prototypes can then influence what people expect in future relationships. As Sternberg suggested, when we become adults, our ideas about love stem from our childhood love stories. We grow up with images and experiences involving our own parents, grandparents, and extended family. We glean ideas from the media about love and relationships all the time. Our culture and religion teach us about how to connect with other people. And our individual experiences with security, support, care, punishment, shame, fear, and self-esteem shape our ideas about love. Attachment changes our brains and shapes our ability to love (Lewis et al., 2000). Viewing this research through a bioecological lens helps us truly understand love in all its complexity.

Attachment theorists contend that we follow what we know and seek out those who confirm our internal working models, even if it’s not emotionally healthy or safe for us. We do what feels familiar, and sometimes this results in our limbic brains being less able to change and grow in order to learn to regulate separation and loss experiences. Our internal working models are like ideologies we develop about love. These ideologies influence the way we seek mates, hook up with people, express or don’t express our love for them, fight with them, and ultimately, how successful we can be in love relationships. People who are securely attached see themselves as loveable and so often seek out love partners who value them, treat them with respect, and see their good qualities.
ADULT ATTACHMENT

Like human children and Harlow’s monkeys, adults seek out attachment figures to help them regain a sense of security when stressed (Pietromonaco et al., 2006). Securely attached people tend to have constructive conflicts with their mates, where problems are solved without blaming, shaming, screaming, or violent confrontation. People with an insecure/anxious/preoccupied attachment style have sometimes experienced inconsistent care from caregivers and often enter adult love relationships with intense fears of betrayal and abandonment. They desire love and intimacy yet they often sabotage relationships through being too clingy and emotionally unstable (Reynolds, Searight, & Ratwik, 2014). In contrast, people with dismissing/avoidant styles avoid intimacy at all costs. They may have relationships with others but they do not allow themselves to be vulnerable. They put up walls, do not share emotions, and often appear cold and distant. Fearful/avoidant people feel such anxiety over intimacy that they choose to disengage in order to avoid the potential pain of getting too involved with others.

Each of these attachment styles affects the success and health of love relationships (Marganska, Gallagher, & Miranda, 2013). Two securely attached people have the best chances of lifelong health and happiness. But people with any of the other three attachment styles can be involved in healthy relationships, especially if their partner is secure. Any person, but most often those with a secure attachment history, can modulate fear in others by the way they present and communicate their emotions. Romantic partners help their mates to regulate their emotions in order to be able to handle stress better. Even if one has an insecure attachment style, simply loving and connecting with their partner may serve positive functions in helping the person face stress. In the opposite case, and the more likely scenario for people with insecure styles, one partner may influence an escalation of conflict and help their partners to dysregulate their feelings and behaviors, leading to emotional turmoil.

Because most of us learned our styles of attachment and emotion regulation in our families of origin, we can also learn a lot about coping with emotional situations by seeing our partners interacting with their own parents. For example, if your partner tends to walk away or clam up during emotional discussions, this may be puzzling at first. But then when you witness your partner’s mother doing this at holiday gatherings, it may provide some insight into why your partner may not have developed the skills to discuss issues. This is a perfect opportunity to try to help your partner regulate his or her emotions and learn how to talk without shutting you out. Thus, mesosystem influences such as our parents’ interactions with each other when we were children, or witnessing our partner’s interactions with their own parents as adults can affect our relationship functioning.

Pietromonaco and fellow researchers (2006) posit that affective reactivity (“affect” is another word for emotion) underlies the internal working models of the attachment system. Affective reactivity is the frequency with which a person perceives threat, resulting in a need to find security by dealing with feelings in a more or less reactive way. This need to cope with perceived threat sets in motion affect regulation strategies, which are patterns of behavior enacted to establish a sense of emotional security (Pietromonaco, DeBuse, & Powers, 2013). Because internal working models shape our views of others and ourselves,
they guide our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and sculpt our affect regulation strategies. For example, if my internal working model is one of avoidance, and I am on the anxious side, I might see my partner looking at another person in a sexual manner and feel threatened. Because I probably have a history of emotional rejection or other forms of insecurity from my parents or previous romantic partners, my affect regulation strategy will include ways to regulate my anxiety as well as my need to avoid intimacy. I will probably not discuss my concerns with my partner but will become quiet and distant, and may even move on to forming a relationship with someone else who does not cause me any anxiety. Thus, I have maintained the stability of my internal working model and am likely to continue to be anxious and avoidant in the future. Because insecurely attached people tend to have high levels of affective reactivity, it would take a lot of emotional work for them to change their internal working model and maintain a sense of calm security in relationships. They’d have to retrain their limbic brains to be less threatened by intimacy and remain calm in the face of conflict.

In this same situation, someone who was securely attached might say “Gee, honey, I saw you looking seductively at that person who walked by. Did you think he or she was cute?” Because the secure internal working model views the self as worthy of love and relationships as emotionally stable, no sense of threat is activated by a partner looking at someone else. Secure couples may even allow their partners to have “celebrity crushes” or fantasies about others. Their threat systems are not easily activated and they feel secure in their romantic connections. They have low levels of affective reactivity.

People who have high affective reactivity will frequently perceive a threat to their romantic attachments, their affective threat systems will often be elevated, and they will need to expend a lot more energy on regulating their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors

**Cartoon 6.1 Avoidant Attachment**

What attachment style do you think this king has?

“Enemies, yes, but doesn’t your moat also keep out love?”
(Pietromonaco et al., 2006). When both partners are securely attached, however, their conflicts are mild, their behaviors are synchronized, one person doesn’t dominate the other, they resolve conflicts in a caring manner, and each partner helps to regulate the other’s distress (Schneiderman, Zilbertstein-Kra, Leckman, & Feldman, 2011). Take a look at Figure 6.1 and see where you think you lie in the attachment classification of adults.

Are you a highly affectively reactive person or are you cool as a cucumber? Do you tend to rely on others or are you pretty self-contained or avoidant? Attachment theorists would argue that if you have a hunch about which type of internal working model you might be walking around with, it could give you some insight into your relationship patterns and perhaps allow you to work toward more productive interactions with those you love. Remember, however, that our attachment styles and internal working models (plus their concomitant neurochemistry) are only one part of the big picture of love. Every level of influence, beginning with our biology and personality, and moving out to our microsystem interactions, mesosystem influences, and exosystem, affects, shapes, and molds our love. The biocological model would not allow us to stop with simply analyzing our internal working models. It always includes larger social and cultural influences to explain relationship phenomena, and we turn to these next.

**FIGURE 6.1 Affective Reactivity**

The connection between affective reactivity and regulation.

![Diagram showing the affective reactivity and regulation]

MACROSYSTEM FORCES

Levine, Sato, Hashimoto, and Verma (1990) examined love in many cultures (India, Pakistan, Thailand, Mexico, Brazil, Japan, Hong Kong, Philippines, Australia, England, and the United States). They found that romantic love was most important to those living in Western nations and less important for those in developing and Eastern nations. Nyrop (1985) found that in India many people viewed romantic love and emotional attachments as threats to the family. In one study of middle-class Gujarati Indians, they expressed that forming a relationship based on physical attraction is inferior to connecting with a partner based on family values and status (Twamley, 2013). In some Hindu traditions, love is not a valid reason to marry but it is acceptable if it develops after marriage (Coontz, 2005). As discussed previously, for many cultures, too much love between a husband and wife is felt to undermine love for family and love of God. On the other hand, many couples find that connecting through their spirituality and expressing their love for God together can enhance marital quality (David & Stafford, 2013).

Despite these findings of an East/West difference, research shows that with the spread of technology and with all of us living an increasingly globalized world, people in developing and Eastern nations are beginning to adopt Western relationship values. For example, in a study of Chinese online daters, they reported a closer affiliation with the Western ideals of love and passion than to traditional Eastern values (Lange, Houran, & Li, 2015).

Interestingly, the importance people place on romantic love is inversely related to the availability of large extended kin networks (Goode, 1959). In cultures where people have many extended family members living in close proximity, individuals get their needs met by siblings, cousins, in-laws, and elders, so less pressure is placed on marriages for emotional fulfillment. In many of these extended kin network cultures, marriages are arranged for the benefit of the whole family. The cross-cultural study by Levine and co-researchers (1990) found that people in India, Pakistan, and Thailand were most likely to marry people without love as a deciding factor. In contrast, Brazilians were most likely to say that diminished love should lead to divorce, while people in the Philippines were least likely to believe this.

Each culture also has its own rituals related to the practice of love and romance. Illouz (1997) describes romantic rituals as being of the same nature as religious rituals. She says that romance is like a “staged reality” where rituals are practiced just like in a spiritual ceremony. For example, eating at a nice restaurant is a traditional Western love “ritual” and is the most commonly reported romantic event. If we examine this “ritual” more closely, it can be mapped on to Illouz’s four symbolic assessments of love rituals:

1. temporal
2. emotional
3. spatial
4. artifactual

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The *temporal assessment* of ritualized love relates to isolated time increments. For example, we tend to view romantic time as different from secular, or ordinary, time. Romantic time seems more special, less ordinary, than our mundane lives. Romantic time often occurs at night rather than in the daytime. We may see specific seasons as more romantic as well (“we cuddled by a winter fire” or “we took a romantic sunset walk during the summer”). Certain times of year are also designated as ritualistic romantic time, such as Valentine’s Day or wedding anniversaries. These occur regularly throughout the year, just like religious holidays.

In the *emotional assessment* of romantic rituals, we see romantic feelings as separate from other feelings. Love is special. Our loved one is unique, unlike any other. The feelings we have for him or her are different from the emotions we exhibit toward others. Our romantic love feelings are considered sacred and special, just like our devotion to spiritual or religious paths.

We also set a sacred space for romantic ritual. In the *spatial assessment*, we feel the need to leave ordinary spaces and get away from home. Home is considered an unromantic space so we construct a private space, like a picnic blanket in a park. Or we travel to more romantic spaces like beaches, forests, hotels, or even foreign countries where everyone around us is different and speaks another language. Hearing new sounds and smelling new scents in a foreign land make us feel like we are in a romantic space.

Finally, romance requires an *artifactual assessment*. What artifacts, or objects, do you need to feel romantic? We ritualize the act of eating by using objects that are not of our everyday lives. We may wear special clothing, bring gifts that are more beautiful than ordinary objects, drink wine that’s more expensive than what we drink at home, and so on. The restaurant is considered “nice” because its ritual artifacts include crystal, flowers, fancy dishes and silver, candles, and décor.
As you can probably see, the glitzy restaurant experience embodies all four Westernized romantic prototypes, temporal (“pick you up at eight?”), emotional (“you look stunning tonight”), spatial (“we’ll take that table next to the fireplace”) and artifactual (“their artwork is so beautiful!”). This kind of love assessment often occurs unconsciously but can engender feelings of wanting to either continue or end the relationship with that one special person. And each culture may have completely different sets of romantic prototypes than the ones outlined above. The rituals allow people to make space for true intimacy and for potentially building a lifelong partnership.

It’s often hard for people to believe that the same couple who couldn’t keep their hands off of each other in those first few months, that couple who engaged in all of the romantic processes of love, eventually becomes conflicted, negative, or unhappy. This disillusionment is so common that an entire field of therapy and a specialized master’s degree in marriage and family therapy were developed to help troubled partners. Whether your family is monoamorous, polyamorous, gay, straight, religious, or secular, chances are that your love connection will have its ups and downs over time. Thankfully, there is quite a bit of research on interventions that can help smooth out the bumps in the road.

**PROFESSIONAL HELP FOR ENHANCING LOVE**

Whether we’re monogamous or polyamorous, all relationships take work. They involve conflict and the difficult meshing of two or more life histories and sets of relationship expectations. Goldman and Greenberg (2006) posit that conflicts in love relationships stem from a failure to resolve struggles for identity (such as power, rank, and status) and security. Notice the similarity of this idea to the work on attachment styles. Goldberg and Greenberg (2006) have found in their work that conflicts are often cover-ups for deeper emotional wounds. When people constantly argue over chores not being done or the toothpaste being squeezed from the middle rather than the bottom, the real issues might be related to feeling disrespected, taken advantage of, or not listened to. However, expressing these latter emotions might make a person vulnerable to attack, rejection, or betrayal. Therefore,
people tend to cover up such tender feelings and resort to yelling, anger, and hostility. It's much easier to call someone a slob than to say that "the messy house makes me feel like you don't care about me." Family therapists can help couples reveal their true feelings and stop hiding behind the petty conflicts of everyday life.

One of the most effective forms of couples' therapy is called emotion-focused couples therapy (EFCT) (Goldman & Greenberg, 2006; Johnson, 2008). In this therapy, the couple work to identify negative cycles and the threats they feel undermine their emotional security. What makes emotion-focused couples therapy especially impressive is that it has decades of research evidence supporting its effectiveness. It's not a “self-help” movement, but a scientifically based way to improve our relationships and love lives. The therapist's goal is to increase positive interactions on a daily basis, but he or she also coaches the couple through an identification process, helping them to uncover their true and often vulnerable feelings that underlie the conflicts. To reveal their primary or core emotions often requires the couple to risk being vulnerable in front of each other. Softer emotions like sadness, fear, or shame often underlie the overt expressions of anger and exasperation. Our emotions organize our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (those internal working models of self and others) so it's very important that we come to truly understand our deepest feelings and what is making us tick.

Most romantic partners attempt to understand the emotional needs of their partners and try to fulfill those needs. But often, especially if we come from different types of attachments in our families of origin, our responses to our partners’ needs may be inadequate, misunderstood, or even perceived as threatening. Those partners suffering from insecure, anxious, preoccupied attachments (especially men) are the ones most likely to benefit from EFCT (Dalgleish et al., 2015).

The goals of EFCT are to increase positive emotions between partners and decrease feelings of shame, fear, and anger. Through uncovering the true, softer emotions underlying anger and contempt, the therapist seeks to bolster self-esteem and solidify identity. Through discussion of our true feelings, we come to discover that dysfunctional patterns with our partners often stem from unresolved wounds from our past love experiences with both parents and past partners. Loneliness, abandonment, shame, worthlessness, inadequacy, anger, and hostility start to control our behaviors, and our relationships take on a negative cycle that appears crazy or out of control.

EFCT focuses on each partner gaining a sense of empathy for where the other person came from emotionally, with both their parents and previous partners. It works by bringing the couple together in a sense of empathy and compassion, allowing them to be vulnerable with each other and to feel comfortable sharing their true feelings of loss, pain, and sorrow. Dessaulles, Johnson, and Denton (2003) found that not only did the couples’ relationships improve, but women experiencing EFCT showed greater improvements in depressive symptoms than did women using psychoactive medications like Prozac. This could be explained by the fact that couples learn to control their rage and anger and connect to the softer side of themselves and each other. This can change their limbic functioning. They learn how to regulate negative emotions and proceed in a constructive manner. As Goldman and Greenberg (2006)
say, “one of the best antidotes to escalation is the ability to soothe the vulnerable in the self and others” (p. 239).

Ideal love is freedom, freedom to share your individuality and be intimate with another. Being exactly who you really are and not being afraid are key elements of a healthy, balanced relationship. Being fearless and vulnerable at the same time can increase exponentially the sense of security and fulfillment that each partner feels (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985).

It should be fairly clear to you by now that love itself is not going to be enough to keep a relationship together. Love is not enough of a reason to get married. It will not see you through the hard realizations about yourself on its own. Success in relationships takes a lot of emotionally honest communication, mature decision making, insight into one’s own attachment history, knowledge of cultural expectations, financial savvy, and clear communication about what you want out of the relationship, including your goals for careers and childrearing. This means using the entire triune brain. Being able to make it through the tough times means you are able to fight with but not tear down the other, disagree while still exhibiting compassion, and love yourself enough to know that loving another person does not necessarily mean you should stay with him or her. Love may get you in the door, but relationship skills keep the roof over your head. For a step in the right direction, check out the nearby Brain Food box for some ideas regarding healthy fighting.

When we work on making ourselves the best partners we can be, long-term committed partnerships become more viable. It is to this topic that we now turn in Chapter 7.
CHAPTER SUMMARY

6.1 Identify various definitions of love and discuss three key theories that categorize types of love.

Love is defined as the subjective feeling of emotional connection with another person. We can feel love for our children, family, and friends.

Focusing on love between romantic partners, Sternberg developed a triangular theory of love, with passion, intimacy, and commitment at each corner of the triangle. There are different types of love based on whether the couple is relatively high or low on these components.

Lee also developed a typology of romantic love, with five different types that can predict the health and success of a relationship. Self-expansion theory explores how love is often a context for personal growth and emotional fulfillment, helping partners become their best selves.

BRAIN FOOD

SOME TIPS FOR CONSTRUCTIVE CONFLICT

1. When upset about something, don’t complain about it; suggest a concrete change you would like to see and clearly ask your partner if he or she would be willing to implement the change.

2. Keep disagreements focused on the present situation. Don’t bring up past issues or say “you always . . .”

3. Remember that your partner’s view of the world is just as valid as yours. Start from a place of compassion and compromise; things rarely escalate if you start positively.

4. Don’t assume you know what your partner is thinking—directly ask how he or she feels. Don’t assume your partner can read your mind or “should just know” how you feel or what you need; assume that if you don’t state it, he or she might not know.

5. Do not label your partner or call him or her names. If you really thought your partner was an idiot, lazy, neurotic, or stupid, you probably would not be with him or her in the first place. Do not make sweeping overgeneralizations or judge your partner’s feelings. Be very specific about the issue at hand and work on solving that issue, nothing more.

6. Don’t attempt to prove how right you are; the goal should be to solve the problem through honest expression of emotion and compromise. Choose solutions over being right.

SOURCE: Adapted from Matta, 2006, p. 71.
Discuss the cultural and historical trends around the conceptualization of love.

Historically, love was never the basis for marriage and committed partnerships. It is true that people around the world fall in love, but in many cultures historically and today, love is considered an irrational and unreliable reason for forming a committed partnership. Gender, culture, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation each affect how people envision love and experience their love relationships. Western cultures have idealized the feminized version of love, accepting women’s “natural” abilities to love, nurture, and communicate as better than the way men typically exhibit their love.

Explain the basic biochemistry underlying love relationships over time.

The chapter covered many biological aspects of love, from the bonding neurotransmitter, oxytocin, to the exchange of testosterone in saliva during kissing. The triune brain was presented as way to understand that the emotional limbic system in the brain is often at odds with the more rational neocortical part of the brain. Partners engage in limbic coregulation of their partners by helping each other modulate and understand their emotional lives, especially if they each have a secure attachment history.

Discuss the interpersonal and social contexts of love and related therapeutic procedures for improving love relationships.

Attachment quality develops during childhood when we learn about relationships from our caregivers as well as from social, media, and cultural images. These models of love relationships follow us into adult attachments and can enhance our romantic ties or can cause problems in our ability to connect in a healthy way.

Emotion-focused couples therapy (EFCT) is an effective type of counseling for helping couples understand their attachment histories and how these affect their adult functioning, as well as how they can improve the quality of their love relationships.

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## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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<th>6.1</th>
<th>Identify various definitions of love and discuss three key theories that categorize types of love.</th>
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<td>6.2</td>
<td>Discuss the cultural and historical trends around the conceptualization of love.</td>
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<td>6.3</td>
<td>Explain the basic biochemistry underlying love relationships over time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Discuss the interpersonal and social contexts of love and related therapeutic procedures for improving love relationships.</td>
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## KEY TERMS

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<th>love</th>
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<th>consummate love</th>
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<td>polyamory</td>
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<th>affective reactivity</th>
<th>Illouz’s four symbolic assessments</th>
<th>emotion-focused couples therapy (EFCT)</th>
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Recall one or more experiences you have had with a dating or romantic partner in which you experienced strong negative emotions—hurt, disappointment, anxiety, or similar emotions. As you reflect on such experiences, can you understand how your limbic, emotional brain reacted without the benefit of input from your rational, neocortical brain? How might engaging the rational brain have modified how you were experiencing those negative emotions at the time, and perhaps might have changed the outcome of that problematic interaction with your partner?
CHAPTER 6 STUDY TOOLS

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Reflect on various definitions of love and discuss three key theories that categorize types of love.
- Discuss the cultural and historical trends around the conceptualization of love.
- Explain the basic biochemistry underlying love relationships over time.
- Discuss the interpersonal and social contexts of love and related therapeutic procedures for improving love relationships.

KEY TERMS

- love
- romantic/passionate love
- companionate love
- intimacy
- triangular theory of love
- consummate love
- love stories
- self-expansion theory
- feminized love
- androgynous love
- polyamory
- primary/secondary structure
- multiple primary partners structure
- open model structure

DIGITAL RESOURCES

- Psychological Theories of Love
- Compassionate Love in Romantic Relationships
- Investigating Love’s Universal Attributes
- The Brain in Love
- Looking for Love Online
- Love Across the Lifespan

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Using Sternberg’s triangular theory of love, describe either your current romantic relationship or one from the past. How would you rate your relationship on the three couple characteristics—passion, intimacy, and commitment? How satisfying or unsatisfying was that relationship for you, and why?

2. Would you consider marrying or committing to a partner with whom you were not in love but who was compatible with you in virtually all other ways (e.g., socioeconomic status, personality, physical attractiveness)? In other words, how critical is “being in love” to you, as far as whom you would choose for a life-long mate? Were you aware that many, if not most, arranged marriages, have been found to be at least as successful as, if not more successful than, nonarranged, love-based marriages?

3. Recall one or more experiences you have had with a dating or romantic partner in which you experienced strong negative emotions—hurt, disappointment, anxiety, or similar emotions. As you reflect on such experiences, can you understand how your limbic, emotional brain reacted without the benefit of input from your rational, neocortical brain? How might engaging the rational brain have modified how you were experiencing those negative emotions at the time, and perhaps might have changed the outcome of that problematic interaction with your partner?

4. How did the quality of your parents’ (or step-parents’) relationship influence the way you have interacted with your own romantic partners? How did the quality of your attachment (secure versus insecure) with your parents or caretakers influence the way you have interacted with your romantic partners?