



# A General Theory of Love

By Thomas Lewis, Richard Lannon, Fari Amini

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**A General Theory of Love** By Thomas Lewis, Richard Lannon, Fari Amini

Drawing on new scientific discoveries and seventy years of collective clinical experience, three psychiatrists unravel life's most elemental mystery: the nature of love.

A primordial area of the brain, far older than reason or thinking, creates both the capacity and the need for emotional intimacy that all humans share. **A General Theory of Love** describes the workings of this ancient, pivotal urge and reveals that our nervous systems are not self-contained. Instead, our brains link with those of the people close to us, in a silent rhythm that makes up the very life force of the body. These wordless and powerful ties determine our moods, stabilize and maintain our health and well-being, and change the structure of our brains. In consequence, who we are and who we become depend, in great part, on whom we love.

**A General Theory of Love** applies these and other extraordinary insights to some of the most crucial issues we face in our lives. Its authors explain how relationships function and where love goes wrong, how parents shape a child's developing self, how psychotherapy really works, what curbs and what fosters violent aggression in our children, and how modern society regularly courts disaster by flouting emotional laws it does not yet recognize.

A work of rare originality, passion, and eloquence, **A General Theory of Love** will forever change the way you think about human intimacy.

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

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

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

#### From Publishers Weekly

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

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#### From Library Journal

A traditional subject of poetry and pop psychology is treated here as a scientific construct. Three psychiatry professors (Univ. of California, San Francisco) cover an impressive vista of research and clinical insights from Freud to contemporary neuroscience. They focus on the limbic brain as the source and conduit of emotions like love. The link between the development of the limbic brain and the development of personality are described here in confident prose. Society is castigated for failing to encourage full-time parenting and other policies that support limbic development and the human need for love. Although the authors sometimes substitute metaphor for empirical support and easily dismiss other perspectives, the book is well written and provides a credible introduction to the neuroscience of emotions. Recommended for academic and larger

public libraries.

*-Antoinette Brinkman, Southwest Indiana Mental Health Ctr. Lib., Evansville*

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#### **Leona Ferretti:**

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#### **Thomas Garrett:**

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#### **John Flores:**

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