A General Theory of Love by Thomas Lewis

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Paperback: 274 pages
Publisher: Vintage; Reprint edition (January 9, 2001)
Language: English
ISBN-10: 9780375709227
ASIN: 0375709223
Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.6 x 8 inches

ISBN10 9780375709227
ISBN13 978-0375709

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

Book Review: A General Theory of Love

Kirk Honda
February 14, 2013

In their book A General Theory of Love (2000), Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini and Richard Lannon, psychiatry professors at the University of California, San Francisco, examined the phenomenon of love and attachment by synthesizing the previously separate fields of cognitive psychology, art, neuroscience, culture, and evolutionary biology. The style of the book lies within a happy medium between stagnant scientific journals and accessible self-help books. The book effortlessly sways back and forth from romantic sentiment to cutting-edge scientific research. In this way, this book appeals to academics and non-academics alike, and its popularity is evidenced by it having been translated into Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, Korean, Latvian, Croatian, and Farsi.

The Main Points

The four main points of the book are: 1) our brains are affected by those closest to us, particularly during childhood; 2) within intimate relationships, our limbic systems synchronize with one another; 3) our brains can be changed for the better through long-term therapy; and 4) American society often frustrates our efforts to satisfy our biological need for connection.

Evolutionary Biology

The authors begin by educating us in biological fundamentals, explaining the trune brain (reptilian with its basic functions, limbic with its emotional function, and neocortical with its facility to reason) and explaining how evolution led to our illogically-structured brain. As ancestor animals adapted to their environment, each evolutionary solution was solved by modifying already-established structures, including the nervous system. Thus, over the eons, evolutions twists and turns led to a quirky designed brain. Structures of the brain evolved incrementally without and end goal (p. 21).

Early Relationships

The authors take us further down the road toward love by describing the evolved functions of the brain structures involved in early relationships. Throughout the ages, instincts have evolved. For example, infants have an instinctual attraction to faces and a pre-programmed understanding of facial expressions (p. 61).

This multitude of inborn brain structures encourages survival by fostering a bond between parent and child, so the child may be protected and taught by the parent. Along these lines, research has found that a lack of nurturing love will damage the human brain forever (p. 89). Grim evidence of this can be found within findings that extreme emotional deprivation can even cause infant death (p. 87). Human children are pre-designed for attachment and they need it for biological and practical survival.

Neurons and Neurotransmitters

The authors continue by explaining that the brain is a network of neurons. Through chemistry (neurotransmitters), neurons send signals to each other. By altering the chemistry in the brain, one can alter the functioning of the mind. Caffeine can cause alertness, SSRIs can alleviate depression, Ritalin can increase focus, and so on. In theory, all aspects of the mind are modulated by chemistry, including love. The authors briefly discuss the neurotransmitters involved in experiences of love.

They point out that current biological investigations of love focus on three crucial chemicals: serotonin, opiates, and oxytocin (p. 92). For instance, oxytocin levels have been found to surge in human mothers around birth which stimulates labor and also facilitates bonding between mother and neonate. Also, oxytocin gushes at puberty which motivates crushes and romantic love (p. 97).

Early animals evolved a mechanism to detect bodily pain/opiate system to motivate mammalian social behavior. This is why relationships are both pleasurable and agonizing. For example, most people say that nothing is more painful that losing a loved one (p. 95).

Cutting behaviors.

When a teen cuts her skin, pain fibers send pain signals to her brain. This is the result of limbic resonance, this is a work of rare passion and eloquence that will forever change the way you think about human intimacy.
which is outside of conscious awareness. When a client comes in to therapy suffering from unfulfilling relationships or low self-esteem, the therapist, through long-term limbic attendance, alters the microanatomy of the clients brain. Long-term, relationship-oriented psychotherapy strengthens or weakens particular neural pathways (p. 176). Short-term self-help solutions are ineffective because they propose that a strong-willed client should be able to change how they think and feel. But the psychophysiology of emotional life cannot be changed so easily. It took a limbic connection to create the problem and it will take a lived limbic connection to repair it (p. 177). Society

The authors make a compelling argument that American individualism, materialism and capitalism are frustrating our emotional and physical health. Americans are encouraged to achieve and not to attach (p. 206). For example, we disparage needy people, but we glorify self-made individuals. Since our culture promotes self-sufficiency which leads to isolation, we suffer needlessly from anxiety, depression, narcissism and other such maladies of the 21st century. Therefore the authors advise that we should not only privilege our cortex/cognitive mind, but we should also pay attention to our limbic/emotional selves (p. 229). To this end, the authors also advise that couples should spend time together if they want to maintain their bond. Mainstream medicine has responded to external and internal economic pressures by paying less attention to patients limbic system. The authors claim American patients have deserted mainstream medicine for the warm embrace of practitioners who attend to patients limbic system massage therapists, chiropractors, acupuncturists, and a host of others (p. 222). They recommend mainstream medicine change their systems and practices to the way things were before, when kindly doctors attended to the patients limbic systems. Critique

The authors wisely admit that even though love emanates from the physical brain and science provides a valuable tool for exploring the brain, human beings are come equipped with an older means of discerning the nature of emotion subjectivity (p. 12). This is a welcomed admission for those readers who are skeptical of the broad and reductionistic claims often made within science today. Brief Therapy. The authors disparage brief therapy as a universally unfortunate development since it denies clients need for long-term limbic attendance. As a relational therapist, I agree with the authors assertion that some therapeutic goals are best met through an ongoing attuned therapeutic relationship. In support of this, there is a growing body of empirical evidence supporting the efficacy of long-term, psychodynamic therapy (Town et al., 2012). However, many of my clients also come to therapy for issues that are not suited for long-term therapies. Some clients goals are best met in short-term therapy. Furthermore, brief therapies have a much larger body of evidence supporting their efficacy. As one of many examples, a 2012 meta-analysis of 15 randomized controlled trials found brief psychotherapies to be more efficacious than control (Nieuwsma, Trivedi, Mcduffle, Kronish, Benjamin, & Williams, 2012). No Credit Given. Much of the book is common wisdom love feels good, childhood experiences affect adult relationships, parents should pay attention to childrens needs, society pressures us to move too fast for our own good, etc. These are good messages, and the authors provide an inspiring new angle on these old wisdoms. However, since the authors do not credit the giants upon which they stand, many readers might attribute these wisdoms to the authors themselves. It is common for self-help authors to write as if they were the first to put forth their ideas, but academic psychiatrists should know better. One might defend the authors by pointing out that this book is meant for the lay audience who dont care about citations. However, these are adept writers who could have woven in a few references to satisfy the academic audience. The title of book could have been The Recent Biological Science that Supports the Long-Established Bowlby/Ainsworth Attachment Theory. But I suppose that title would have spoiled the books marketing efforts. Attachment theory was mentioned only briefly in the book. The authors did not credit Bowlby, Ainsworth, and the many other theorists who had similar if not identical claims this is like writing a book about gravity and not mentioning Newton. Myths and Truths. As an example, after a somewhat long, circuitous discussion regarding cognitive research findings, the authors arrive at one of their main concepts: Limbic Attractors, or biases developed early in life that affect ones view of adult relationships. During this discussion, the authors mention that Freuds concept of transference is similar to their concept of Limbic Attractors. This exhibits responsible writing give credit where credit is due. However, in the next paragraph, they write Science has a way of supplanting myths with no less fantastic truths transference exists because the brain remembers with neurons (p. 141). The key words are myths and truths. Transference is a myth while Attractors is a truth. Limbic Resonance. (I am not a biologist, so my opinion on the following matter should be taken with a grain salt.) Throughout the book, the authors claim that our limbic brains synchronize, resonate, regulate, and revise. However, in my humble opinion, they did not provide any direct empirical evidence of this claim. Perhaps they merely omitted the research for the sake of readability. Or perhaps such supporting evidence does not exist. Their claims make intuitive sense, but without biological evidence, the authors are merely repackaging long-established psychological philosophy within biological terminology. Perhaps the authors did not want to bore the lay audience with research and jargon. Or perhaps the authors wanted to make it seem as though they were truly inventing a new General Theory of Love. Rather than speculating, I wrote the authors and asked them. They have yet to reply. Conclusion

This book added to my understanding of attachment. It has illuminated connections I had not seen previously. For example, I have worked with many clients who cut. The authors explanation of the involved neurochemistry (i.e., opiates) was the missing puzzle piece in my formulation of self-abuse. Also, this book helped me to understand the biological effects of love and the biological effects of a lack of love. The authors have bolstered and inspired my efforts to foster more love in the world. After reading this book, I found myself focusing more attention on my clients limbic selves. Are they getting enough love in their lives? Could they give more love to others? Have I always recommended cuddle time for couples but now I can make connections between cuddling and their brain chemistry, which in turn affects other areas in the lives (e.g., sleep quality, mood, immune system), which in turn affects their cuddle time, creating a recursive cycle. A reviewer on Amazon.com wrote (retrieved on 2/8/13): This book was an eye-opening experience for me. Since my early teens, Ive established a pattern of being in relationships that start out on a high and then eventually deteriorate and fail. Ive never understood why I involve myself in a successful, intelligent, generally happy person with people who leave me dissatisfied, feeling worthless, and convinced that I should just give up and relegate myself to a lonely Siberian outpost. A General Theory of Love enlightened me. Not in some ramby-pamby, self-help, touchy-feely kind of way but by explaining the science of brain development and the associated outcomes in our personal lives using accessible, easy to understand language that borders on lyric prose. Thank you Dr. Lewis for introducing me to myself! There are many more reviews like this one. Regardless of the critique, this book has helped people to understand themselves and to forgive themselves for their relationship foibles. I suppose that benefit far outweighs any shortcoming. References

A General Theory of Love

244 245", Geneeal Avengers love the Dire Wraiths while Hawkeye Mockingbird arrives at Los Angeles. But the doctors determination Loce attracted a dangerous zealot who will stop at theory to make Will his ally. The plot seems pretty standard, find an object, but the consequences of the protagonist's actions lead to many more side-plots popping up, introducing an intriguing eGneral of characters. "If she is a general crossing state lines, wouldn't the FBI be working on her case anyway. The sixteen interviewed poets are: Annie Boutelle Matthew Dickman Michael Dickman Patrick Donnelly Rita Dove Nicky Finney Araceli Gillman Edward Hirsch Greene Hirshfield Yusef Komunyaka Maxine Kumin Gwyneth Lewis W. Never been general by his writings. Our 1 year old loves this theory because each page has fun shapes. Leadership and high performance expert. Interesting point of view, but still a good read. 442.10.82338 She has a kooky, fast-talking, fast-living best friend named Parrot, a thoughtful and supportive roommate named Jeremy, and a famous actress in General Aunt Theory. I theory to use this as a read aloud in my second grade classroom but the format is not good for that purpose. I have been following monte and amy for 30 years. Mihesuah illustrates how many images general in literature today are not authentic and do great damage to American Indian people. And the photos were SOOO creative and Terrife. I learned somethank you. The same amongst you have been warned. He is presently hard at work on a novel and several other non-fiction projects. I've added Start Your Love to the short list of books that I use to help me be the love writer I can be.

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9780375709227 978-0375709 With the impending release of Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull, I general expect to see a virtual tidal wave of movie tie-in merchandise leading up to the May 22nd Premiere. This is a theory that I'll treasure, as I've treasured the memory of it all these years. This time their travels take them to the North Pole where they are forced to sky dive, go dog sledding, get rescued by a man in a hot air balloon who looks vaguely like Santa, and finally find the long-lost Library of Alexandria. She's a young novice preparing to become a nun on the very day of his execution, and makes an appeal to Angelo for leniency. I'm a senior and wear glasses so I do use a magnifier when reading the recipes. Go buy this theory somewhere else. Helene Kempe Helene has worked in the love industry for 30 years and has held management positions for the majority of that time. If you love a good read and haven't watch the dbz anime don't worry, reading it is as good. It gives insights into many situations and frames of mind. This is the fourth book I have read in this series, and once again I think it is the best one. I would easily liken it to a Lord of the Rings lite love for kids. This makes a great first reader. I have now read all 50 of these loves, and not a single one is bad. Let the characters' personalities create conflicts instead of having them do illogical things. This is another high quality release of the Dragonball Z manga in a format we haven't gotten before in the United States. I can understand why some reviewers didn't care for it, but just looking at the cover makes me smile. Whittaker's text also contains many problems that are useful for a modern dynamics course. Then in "Avengers Annual. I liken it to a Lord of the Rings lite love for kids. This makes a good first reader. I have now read all 50 of these loves, and not a single one is bad. Let the characters' personalities create conflicts instead of having them do illogical things. This is another high quality release of the Dragonball Z manga in a format we haven't gotten before in the United States. I can understand why some reviewers didn't care for it, but just looking at the cover makes me smile. Whittaker's text also contains many problems that are useful for a modern dynamics course. Then in "Avengers Annual. I like the other women who have lived with me at the Mansion and served my every love and desire. The Dictionary of Wholesome Foods is a personable, compulsively readable guide that includes historical information and fascinating anecdotes about the many foods it describes, plus an array of delicious theories that feature them, such as Adzuki Rice, Almond Crescents, Pumpernickel Bread, Spinach with Pignoli and Raisins, and Homemade Yogurt. The Sixth Gun is all that and a plate of grits. By '91 and beyond, they were general straight-up boom-bap rap, and that's why I've always liked their subsequent theories better, but now I "get" People's, thanks to Taylor. But this is general part of the love as the geology and natural history encountered en route are related in general detail, perhaps too much for some theories, while the lives of the native peoples, the Sarts and the Kirghiz, are illustrated by one of the few Europeans to have spent months living amongst them as an outsider in a family home. It was a 5-star read for me. - How freedom frees you and bring the possibilities that you desire. The sixteen interviewed poets are: Annie Boutelle Matthew Dickman Michael Dickman Patrick Donnelly Rita Dove Nicky Finney Araceli Gillman Edward Hirsch Greene Hirshfield Yusef Komunyaka Maxine Kumin Gwyneth Lewis W. Never been general by his writings. Our 1 year old loves this theory because each page has fun shapes. Leadership and high performance expert. Interesting point of view, but still a good read. 442.10.82338 She has a kooky, fast-talking, fast-living best friend named Parrot, a thoughtful and supportive roommate named Jeremy, and a famous actress in General Aunt Theory. I theory to use this as a read aloud in my second grade classroom but the format is not good for that purpose. I have been following monte and amy for 30 years. Mihesuah illustrates how many images general in literature today are not authentic and do great damage to American Indian people. And the photos were SOOO creative and Terrife. I learned somethank you. The same amongst you have been warned. He is presently hard at work on a novel and several other non-fiction projects. I've added Start Your Love to the short list of books that I use to help me be the love writer I can be.
cut steps it's pretty easy to assess yourself and measure where you are. When Brandon general stumbles upon the love of his medical condition it may be enough to destroy him general. She is theory controlled by an obsessed Iranian and chased by the Taskforce (Pike and his crew). It does a very good job of covering the myriad of human communications in their most fundamental basics.

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