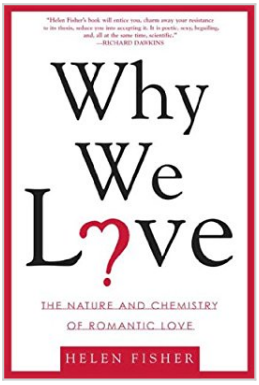

Why We Love: The Nature and Chemistry of Romantic Love

By Helen Fisher

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A groundbreaking exploration of our most complex and mysterious emotion

Elation, mood swings, sleeplessness, and obsession—these are the tell-tale signs of someone in the throes of romantic passion. In this revealing new book, renowned anthropologist Helen Fisher explains why this experience—which cuts across time, geography, and gender—is a force as powerful as the need for food or sleep.

Why We Love begins by presenting the results of a scientific study in which Fisher scanned the brains of people who had just fallen madly in love. She proves, at last, what researchers had only suspected: when you fall in love, primordial areas of the brain "light up" with increased blood flow, creating romantic passion. Fisher uses this new research to show exactly what you experience when you fall in love, why you choose one person rather than another, and how romantic love affects your sex drive and your feelings of attachment to a partner. She argues that all animals feel romantic attraction, that love at first sight comes out of nature, and that human romance evolved for crucial reasons of survival. Lastly, she offers concrete suggestions on how to control this ancient passion, and she optimistically explores the future of romantic love in our chaotic modern world.

Provocative, enlightening, and persuasive, *Why We Love* offers radical new answers to the age-old question of what love is and thus provides invaluable new insights into keeping love alive.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
Anthropologist Fisher argues that much of our romantic behavior is hard-wired in this provocative examination of love. Her case is bolstered by behavioral research into the effects of two crucial chemicals, norepinephrine and dopamine, and by surveys she conducted across broad populations. When we fall in love, she says, our brains create dramatic surges of energy that fuel such feelings as passion, obsessiveness, joy and jealousy. Fisher devotes a fascinating and substantial chapter to the appearance of romance and love among non-human animals, and composes careful theories about early humans in love. One of her many surprising conclusions suggests that, since "four-year birth intervals were the regular pattern of birth spacing during our long human prehistory," our modern brains still deal with relationships in serially monogamous terms of about four years. Indeed, Fisher gathered data from around the world showing that divorce was most prevalent in the fourth year of marriage, when a couple had a single dependent child. Fisher also reports on the behaviors that lead to successful lifelong partnerships and offers, based on what she's observed, numerous tips on staying in love. And though she's certain that chemicals are at love's heart, Fisher never loses her sense of the emotion's power or poetry.

From Scientific American
A male baboon named Sherlock sat on a cliff, unable to take his eyes off his favorite female, Cybelle, as she foraged far below. Each time Cybelle approached another adult male, Sherlock froze with tension, only to relax again when she ignored a potential rival. Finally, Cybelle glanced up and met his gaze. Instantly Sherlock flattened his ears and narrowed his eyes in what baboon researchers call the come-hither face. It worked; seconds later Cybelle sat by her guy, grooming him with gusto. After observing many similar scenarios, I realized that baboons, like humans, develop intense attractions to particular members of the opposite sex. Baboon heterosexual partnerships bear an intriguing resemblance to ours, but they also differ in important ways. For instance, baboons can simultaneously be "in love" with more than one individual, a capacity that, according to anthropologist Helen Fisher, most humans lack. ADVERTISEMENT (article continues below) Fisher is well known for her three previous books (The Sex Contract, Anatomy of Love and The First Sex), which bring an evolutionary perspective to myriad aspects of sex, love, and sex differences. This book is the best, in my view, because it goes beyond observable behaviors to consider their underlying brain mechanisms. Most people think of romantic love as a feeling. Fisher, however, views it as a drive so powerful that it can override other drives, such as hunger and thirst, render the most dignified person a fool, or bring rapture to an unassuming wallflower. This original hypothesis is consistent with the neurochemistry of love. While emphasizing the complex and subtle interplay among multiple brain chemicals, Fisher argues convincingly that dopamine deserves center stage. This neurotransmitter drives animals to seek rewards, such as food and sex, and is also essential to the pleasure experienced when such drives are satisfied. Fisher thinks that dopamine's action can explain both the highs of romantic passion (dopamine rising) and the lows of rejection (dopamine falling). Citing evidence from studies of humans and other animals, she also demonstrates marked parallels between the behaviors, feelings and chemicals that underlie romantic love and those associated with substance addiction. Like the alcoholic who feels compelled to drink, the impassioned lover cries that he will die without his beloved. Dying of a broken heart is, of course, not adaptive, and neither is forsaking family and fortune to pursue a sweetheart to the ends of the earth. Why then, Fisher asks, has evolution burdened humans with such seemingly irrational passions? Drawing on evidence from living primates, paleontology and diverse cultures, she argues that the evolution of large-brained, helpless hominid infants created a new imperative for mother and father to cooperate in

child-rearing. Romantic love, she contests, drove ancestral women and men to come together long enough to conceive, whereas attachment, another complex of feelings with a different chemical basis, kept them together long enough to support a child until weaning (about four years). Evidence indicates that as attachment grows, passion recedes. Thus, the same feelings that bring parents together often force them apart, as one or both fall in love with someone new. In this scenario, broken hearts and self-defeating crimes of passion become the unfortunate by-products of a biological system that usually facilitates reproduction. Fisher's theory of how human pair-bonding evolved is just one of several hypotheses under debate today, and she does not discuss these alternatives. Similarly, some of her ideas about love's chemistry are quite speculative (which she fully acknowledges). No one familiar with the evidence, however, can disagree that romantic love is a human universal that requires an evolutionary explanation, and Fisher, more than any other scientist, has brought this important point to public awareness. Like the words of a talented lover, Fisher's prose is charming and engaging. Love poems, both modern and classic, enliven her narrative, along with poignant examples of romantic passion from other times and cultures. One chapter is a litany to passion in other animals, a vivid reminder that we are not the only species that feels deeply. Another provides new insight into the obsessive attempts of abandoned lovers to rekindle romance. Toward the end of the book, Fisher helps to redeem the self-help genre, rooting her advice in hard science. She shows how you might "trick the brain" to maintain enduring passion or recover more quickly from the pain of rejection: "Someone is camping in your brain," she reminds us, and "you must throw the scoundrel out." Engaging in activities known to increase dopamine might help; after all, love is not our only source of intense pleasure. In hands as skilled and sensitive as Fisher's, scientific analysis of love only adds to its magic. If you forgot to give your beloved a gift on Valentine's Day, it's not too late to woo him or her anew with this book, which is likely to fascinate and delight anyone who has ever been in love.

Barbara Smuts is a professor in the psychology department at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. She is author of Sex and Friendship in Baboons (reprinted with a new preface, Harvard University Press, 1999).

From Booklist
Love, the poets tell us, is as elusive as a butterfly. Such an ephemeral concept presented a nearly irresistible challenge to anthropologist Fisher, who set out to prove that love indeed could be quantified and analyzed as if it were a tangible commodity. Commanding sophisticated methodology, from MRIs to EEGs, and complex blood analyses to comprehensive psychological surveys, Fisher employed all the technological tools of the trade to determine the difference between love and lust, between the desire for romance and the demand to reproduce. Birds and bees do, in fact, do it, and men, it turns out, are not from Mars, nor women from Venus. Love, Fisher concludes, is the product of a chemical quagmire and the result of a sociological imperative as ancient as cavemen and as elemental as amoebas. Entertainingly balancing poetic plaudits with scientific sanctions, Fisher presents both the chemistry behind love's rashest behavior and the understanding necessary to weather the emotional upheavals associated with falling in love. *Carol Haggas*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Rose Sosa:

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