

Relationship Matters - Podcast Number 09

[Start of recorded material]

Host: From Champlain College in Burlington, Vermont, *this* is Relationship Matters!

Hello and welcome to Relationship Matters, the podcast of the Journal of Social and Personal Relationships. I'm your host, Dr Bjarne Holmes. Welcome to podcast number 9! We're going to be talking to Elaine Hatfield today about 'passionate love and sexual desire', a topic she's pioneered in terms of research.

First I want to give a shout-out to Nicole Atkins; Nicole might just be one of our most dedicated fans out there, she's an intern for our partner project, Science of Relationships.com, a research assistant in Cynthia Moore's lab at Portland State University and she used to work for John Gottman's research lab. Nicole sent me the *suggestion* for the article we're going to talk about today and I just thought it was amazing to get such an excellent listener suggestion, so thank you Nicole!

From beautiful Hawaii we are joined on the phones today by legendary Elaine Hatfield! Dr Hatfield is Professor of Psychology at the University of Hawaii, at Manoa. In 2012 she'll be awarded a Lifetime of Scientific Achievement Award from the Association for Psychological Science. In recent years she's been awarded Career Achievement Awards from the Society for Experimental Social Psychology, from the Society for the Scientific study of Sex and she's even been awarded the Alfred Kinsey award. She's been interviewed previously by people like Barbara Walters and Phil Donahue, so we're delighted to get our turn! Professor Hatfield, welcome to Relationship Matters!

Respondent: Oh hello.

Host: Now I do hope you realise that to young relationship researchers like myself, you indeed are legendary!

Respondent: Oh that's very sweet of you, that's wonderful.

Host: And I've also got Matt Grasso here with me in the studio – Matt's our studio technician and also the absolutely quintessential Vermont guy, so whom better to talk to today about love, passion and sex? – say 'hello', Matt.

Matt: I'm very jealous of the whole Hawaii thing. I actually am happy to hear that it's raining there because I'm upset that I'm not there!

Host: Matt, if you keep that smirk I might even let you ask a question or two later!

Matt: Absolutely!

Host: So the article we're going to talk to you about today is titled 'A brief history of social scientists' attempt to measure passionate love' and it's free to download from the website of the Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, courtesy of Sage Publications. It's now out in the March 2012 issue, that's volume 29, issue 2. The paper is co-authored by Lisa Marie Benson of Hillborough College and also by Richard Rapson, also of the University of Hawaii.

So, Elaine, what is 'passionate love'?

Respondent: When people first started research they didn't know how to define it, so every area defined it their own way – if you were a cognitive psychologist you said it was a cognition, a physiologist; it was a physiological response – we know it's all those things, it's all emotions coming together in a little clump and all the parts interrelate, not perfectly but pretty well. So it's cognitive, physiological and behavioural, efforts to get really close to another person, to kind of *merge* with them.

Host: So if you were to describe this for the every day person, how would you describe 'passionate love' for them?

Respondent: You practically want to *melt* into the other person – love and sex are *really* closely linked, not identical but, boy, very close and it's capable of producing ecstasy or total misery; it's a really powerful emotion.

Host: So what exactly was this paper about?

Respondent: I've been doing research now on 'passionate love' for about 50 years and I started with Helen Brochard and we were doing this little book on 'interpersonal attraction' and we wanted just one crumbly little chapter on 'passionate love' and we couldn't find research – it's pathetic! – if you look back to that original book, we're taking principals from organisational psychology to try and talk about *passion*! But what we found were all these measures of passionate love that quite famous scholars had developed and then they quit, they never went on to do any more research, I guess it was just too taboo and too hard. So over the years I've been collecting each new generation's attempt to measure passionate love and this paper lists them all – because I'm probably the only living person that remembers all these measures and has copies of them. I sent them to the Kinsey Institute, so now I don't have to be around much longer [laughs].

Host: So what did you find?

Respondent: Well it would be really interesting to go back and do kind of a content analysis of all these measures, nobody's ever done that, to see has the

meaning of 'love' changed, but in all the time that we've been looking at these measures we started with a whole bunch of questions, like 'what is love?', 'how long does it last?', 'do men and women love equally?', 'is it a cultural universal?', those questions are pretty well answered now, so that we know it is a cultural universal, we know it fades with time but no faster than companionate love – everybody always thinks companionate love increases but they both go down in time.

Host: How do you define 'companionate love'?

Respondent: 'Companionate love', yeah, kind of friendly love, you know, like people always say 'passionate love is this brilliant fire but it goes down to a small cosy fire', well that's not what the data say; the data say that *both* decline with time – but that means 70 years – we've interviewed people from zero to like 92, so it isn't that dismal. Now is the best time for love researchers because 5 years ago, for my students, I got historians and futurists to make predictions about how the world would change in 50 years – well, it's changed *already!* – some of these things that were supposed to happen in 50 years, go to APA and you'll find this year there are whole sessions on matching by the computer, websites, sex toys, sex dolls, boys and girls that can have a fake sweetheart who's a cartoon character but perfect, on their little telephone, I mean things are changing so fast and we ought to be able to find out more about the universal nature of passion and the cultural changes and economic changes that produce differences in it.

Host: When you talk to the every day person, when I talk to them about love and the science of love, often their eyes glaze over and they go 'how can you measure love!?' ...

Respondent: [Laughs]

Host: ... what's your response to that?

Respondent: Oh, we can measure it really well! About 30 years ago we developed a Passionate Love Scale and it's been used in practically every country in the world and just recently they started doing FMRI research and finding out, when you looked at a picture of your sweetheart versus a friend, what areas of the brain lit up. Well, surprisingly, people self reports of are they desperately in love or not match what's going on in the brain perfectly well – [8.18] *gets* huge correlation, so big they're improbable, there must be something slightly right wrong there because the correlation between the scale and brain activity is too high, knowing what we know about measures, but it's a real thing and two measurements in two different domains; self report *and* measures of FMRI reaction.

Host: Yes, and I've understood that it's the striatum that lights up, which is a region that also lights up when you're on cocaine.

Respondent: Yes. Absolutely. There's a new paper out that's really good, by Stephanie Cacioppo and I, until that paper, was always a big cynic, saying 'oh yeah, yeah, I know it lights up' but it's new research and then I'd cite that cringe-making experiment where they put a dead salmon in an FMRI machine and showed *it* pictures of salmon versus non salmon and they found areas lighting up, which shows there's a huge statistical flaw in picking out these areas. So I always have this smartass stuff to say about it but Stephanie Cacioppo is a really good researcher, modest and she reviews the results of about 15 or 20 studies that did passionate love research and she says 'yup, there really is something there and we can detect it'.

Host: For our every day person listening to this, what is it that they can take away, what is the one thing out of your 30/40/50 years of doing this that you really want to get across to them?

Respondent: Well, I think that people always say how you should be so sensible about who you love and not have a fairytale view of it but I think it's almost impossible to do that. We've had the most sensible people in the world, like lawyers, when we did therapy and they would say 'I'm not going to see that stripper, I'm breaking up my family, I'm destroying my life' and then they'd ask 'can I borrow your phone, on the way out of the office because I want to talk to her?' – passionate love is just so strong. So I think young kids can't be sensible in their choices, they're just going to have to know that you get your heart broken many, many, many times before you get to be a sensible person, find out what you want in relationships and maybe hope to get a *little* bit of it anyway.

Host: Now I happen to know that you have quite an interesting love story yourself; you're married to Richard Rapson, who also is a co-author on this paper and I happen to also know that you guys do quite a lot of writing together – a few years ago you actually sent me a personal copy of Rosie, which is a novel ...

Respondent: Oh yes, that's fun, isn't it.

Host: ... that you and Richard wrote together and I thought it was kind of interesting, Rosie St Giles, the protagonist in that particular book, was a young [11.34] Human Sexuality professor in Hawaii, who was having her research attacked on the national stage by a US senator running for President - is that a real story?

Respondent: Yes. I got the Golden Fleece Award when I was just a young girl and not as well protected emotionally as I am now. I got it when I lived in Wisconsin and it was the first of his awards and he's so witty, he just wrote these devastating mockery of social psychologists and all their research but Helen Brochard and my research was both the first and a special focus because it was on 'love and sex' and so we got bags of mail and some of the letters, I couldn't make them up you see, they're in that book and they are very, very funny but for me *personally* that was a

terrible time but you get over it, you know. And now love research is so well accepted, except there are like far right things all the time. I mean, here we are at this moment, swirling with [12.53], it sounds like we're back to the 1500s, much less 1950, you know. So you get all that stuff again and today and it's probably much worse for young researchers because there's so much publicity but *that* part of the book was true, all the hot sex alas was not true.

Host: [Laughs] So you and Richard, what's your love story?

Respondent: Oh, he's a sweetheart, he's just a better husband than anyone deserves, so we really have a good time – he likes foreign films and classical music and so all the things you sort of hope for. I've been married twice and my first marriage was *not* such a big success but this one certainly is. And by the way, if anybody wants a free copy of Rosie, they can just write to me by email – the publisher gave me a whole bunch of extras, which was very sweet, they wouldn't do that today, or maybe they assumed they wouldn't sell them, you know [laughs].

Host: So you can just write to Elaine at elaineh@hawaii.edu - and you'll send a copy!

Respondent: Yes.

Host: Well, Professor Hatfield, this has been a *great* conversation, I want to thank you very much.

Respondent: Oh, and I'm so glad to get to talk to you finally.

Host: It was great to speak with you as well and aloha!

Respondent: Okay. And thank you so much for the chance to do this, it was lots of fun.

Host: Any time. Hopefully we can do it again in 10 years.

Respondent: Oh that sounds great and I'll tell you if all the research has been done with the new one night stands, sex toys, etc. and see if that changes Americans' views of love.

Host: Looking forward to that, we certainly want a sex positive society!

Respondent: Okay, bye-bye.

Host: Okay, bye-bye.

You're listening to Relationship Matters, I'm your host Dr Bjarne Holmes. If today inspired you to learn more about passionate love and sexual desire research or to perhaps just check out some of Dr Hatfield's

writing, you can learn more about her work from her website, Elaine Hatfield.com. Until next time, aloha.

Relationship Matters is a production of the Journal of Social and Personal Relationships in Sage Publications. You can subscribe through iTunes by searching for 'Sage podcasts' or access the series from the web page of the journal, send us an email at jsrprpodcast@gmail.com, follow us on Facebook by searching for 'Journal of Social and Personal Relationships' or follow us on Twitter, [jsrprpodcast](https://twitter.com/jsrprpodcast). The music you've been hearing is by Urban Delights (more at urbandelights.net). Thank you for listening and remember, we're talking Relationship Matters because relationships *matter*.

[End of recorded material]