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Is Love an Emotion?

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Abstract and Keywords

What kind of mental phenomenon is romantic love? Many philosophers, psychologists, and ordinary folk treat it as an emotion. This chapter argues the category of emotion is inadequate to account for romantic love. It examines major emotion theories in philosophy and psychology and shows that they fail to illustrate that romantic love is an emotion. It considers the categories of basic emotions and emotion complexes, and demonstrates they too come short in accounting for romantic love. It assesses the roles of culture and evolution in shaping the romantic love phenomenon and evaluates the ways in which the norms of rationality that are applied to standard emotions fail to apply to love. It considers the category of sentiments and argue that despite coming close, it does not adequately capture the nature of romantic love. Finally, the chapter makes a case for love being best characterized as a syndrome.

Keywords: romantic, love, emotion, sentiment, syndrome, category, philosphy, psychology

Romantic love is often thought of as a paradigmatic example of an emotion. Indeed, according to the psychological research, many ordinary people categorize it this way.[1] Some philosophers and psychologists also think that love is an emotion.[2] In this chapter we challenge this assumption and argue instead that romantic love is a syndrome. We begin by looking at various ways in which emotions are categorized in philosophy and psychology. We give an overview of what we take to be major types of emotion theories. We also look at the distinction between basic and nonbasic emotions, and argue that none of the theories together with these distinctions can support the view that love is an emotion. We then look at what some philosophers and psychologists call sentiments, and argue that despite this category coming close to characterizing romantic love, it cannot successfully do so. We show instead that given love's complexity, it is best thought of as a *syndrome*. This notion has been developed within the social constructionist tradition, but we offer a revised presentation of the hypothesis, resisting the idea that love is a mere cultural script.

1. What Is Love?

Is love an emotion? To answer this question we must first agree on a working definition of romantic love. This immediately presents a possibility of circularity, as the definition itself may presuppose that love is or is not an emotion. To avoid this problem let us consider some of the characteristics that are commonly attributed to love. First, love can be felt. People report being overwhelmed by the feeling of love. But does this mean that once in love, one is constantly experiencing the feeling of love? It seems not, for one may be in love for years, and not *feel* love 24/7. This suggests that love is not simply a feeling but instead also exists in a dispositional form. Second, the feeling of love may fall anywhere on the spectrum of pleasantness and unpleasantness. Love can be extremely elating, taking the lover to the highest heights of her happiness, and it can also bring her down into the deepest void of despair. Third, love, like many other mental states is an intentional state in that it is always directed at some object. One isn't simply in love. One is always in love with some particular individual. Furthermore, the lover tends to idealize the beloved. This doesn't necessarily mean that the lover is deluded about the beloved, though that of course is possible. Rather, it often means that the lover is more likely to attribute high value to seemingly trivial traits of the beloved, emphasize her positive characteristics, and downplay her negative ones. Additionally, love's occurrence and absence are not under our control. Certainly one may actively seek love by joining dating sites and going on blind dates. But none of these actions guarantees in any way that one might fall in love. Likewise, when in love, one will have a hard time getting rid of it. For example, upon realizing that there is no hope for reciprocity of one's feelings, one might try to limit contact with the beloved, and occupy oneself with other activities hoping that love will go away, but one cannot simply choose to stop loving.

2. Emotion: Preliminary Remarks

To see whether or not love is an emotion, let us highlight some basic features of emotions. First, emotions are often thought of as *reactive* attitudes that we passively undergo. The fact that we are overcome with joy, overwhelmed with fear, or gripped with anger suggests that emotions are not directly under our control. Second, emotions are said to have *phenomenological* components and are paradigmatically taken to be *felt*. Some emotions exist as dispositions (say, a fear of spiders), but they are felt when the disposition is triggered (as when a spider is encountered). Third, emotions are *intentional* states. While the question of intentionality of emotions is a complex one, there are at least two kinds of "object" of emotions: the *target*, which is the specific thing toward which an instantiation of an emotion is directed, and the *formal object*, which is the property that all instantiations present their targets as possessing. For example, fear of a dog is directed at a dog, which is its target, whereas the formal object of fear is dangerousness. To fear the dog is to attribute to it the property of being dangerous. Emotions, therefore, are evaluations of objects and situations relevant to those who are experiencing them.

Thus far, we can say that emotions are *felt evaluations*. Just as beliefs and desires have functions (the function of beliefs is to track truth, the function of desire is to track the good), the function of emotions is to track that which matters to us.[3] Therefore, a third characteristic of emotion is that it adheres to a particular standard of *correctness*. An emotion may be apt or inapt depending on whether or not it is warranted. This is one important and primary sense in which an emotion can be rational (other dimensions of rationality include having intensity and duration proportionate to the eliciting conditions). An emotion is apt if the formal object that it is picking out is actually provided by the target. For example, fear is apt if the dog of which one is afraid is actually dangerous. Certain aspects of the target are supposed to warrant the attribution of dangerousness.[4] So it would be apt to

experience fear of a large dog, which is showing its teeth, growling, while fixing its eyes on you, and preparing to pounce. It would not be apt to experience fear if the dog exhibits no such behavior, and instead is acting friendly, is ignoring you, or is dead. At the same time the question of fittingness is sometimes confused with other norms like the practical and the moral. One may think, for example, that one should still be afraid of the dog because of some practical concerns (one should always be afraid in order to be prepared to flee). Or one may think that no matter what, one should not experience fear because fear is not praiseworthy. One should instead always aim for courage out of moral considerations. These norms however, have no relevance to the issue of aptness of emotions.[5]

Romantic love may seem to possess these characteristics. As discussed earlier, it seems that love happens involuntarily and we have little control over loving and not loving. It can be felt, though it need not be felt all the time. It always has a target though it is not clear if there is a formal object of love such that it could be apt or inapt.[6]

3. Theories of Emotion

These issues can be elucidated by looking at specific theories of emotions. In this discussion, we do not weigh in on debates about which theory is right. We want to show that love is not an emotion regardless of which theory is right. To do this, we review some leading theories, and show how each has difficulty accommodating love.

3.1. Emotions as Cognitive States

Roughly, emotion theories in philosophy can be divided into cognitive and noncognitive theories, with some positions that fall in between. Cognitive theories define emotions as being constituted partly or wholly by cognitive states. These theories are also often characterized as "propositional attitudes" theories because in explaining emotions, they take beliefs and judgments to be their core features. For example, Robert Solomon and Martha Nussbaum hold that emotions are evaluative judgments.[7] These judgments represent certain aspects of the world as being value-laden. To be afraid of a dog is to believe that there is a dog here and to judge it to be dangerous. Other cognitive views combine judgments or beliefs with desires.[8] For example, to feel fear is to believe that there is danger and to desire to avoid it.

An advantage of cognitive views is that they can account for the intentionality of emotions in a seemingly simple way. Since beliefs and judgments are taken to be propositional attitudes, the content of these attitudes, particularly the evaluative judgment that the dog is dangerous, represents the formal object of the emotion. By tracking the formal object of the emotion through an evaluative judgment, the theory is able to individuate emotion-types.

Can love be an emotion under this view? Perhaps in love one would believe that a particular person has certain properties and judge them to be lovable. What might these properties be? When having the misfortune to be asked, "What do you love him for?" or "How can you possibly love *her*?" people tend to cite some intrinsic properties of the beloved in their explanations. They say that their beloved is kind, smart, funny, caring, has a good taste in music, and so forth. But do these properties really make the beloved lovable? If the formal object of lovability is grounded in the focal properties the beloved possesses, then, as with other emotions, the conditions that make a given emotion apt generalize over all cases for that emotion. So just as fear is always apt in the presence of danger, so too, it would seem, love should always be apt in the presence of certain focal properties

of the beloved.[9] So if we love our beloveds for properties *x*, *y*, and *z*, we should love all those who possess the same set of properties. Yet, it is clear that we don't. Nor can it be said that everyone falls for the same properties. Love, unlike fear, has no clear formal object.

Cognitive theories of love face a further difficulty owing to their cognitive commitments. We are sometimes unable to articulate what it is we love about a person. This can occur in pathological cases, when we explicitly judge that a person is bad for us, but our love endures. Even in healthy cases, reasons for love can be ineffable. Efforts to say why one loves a particular person may come out sounding too generic to account for the intense feelings toward that individual, and their endurance as the qualities of that individual change over time. One might take this as evidence that love is sometimes grounded in representations of the beloved that are not cognitive in nature—not based, that is, on any conceptualization of lovable properties. Theories that include a desire component can address this worry to some extent, because we can desire a person without having fixed beliefs as to why, but this is to give up on the commitment to a judgment component, which is integral to cognitive theories.

3.2. Emotions as Bodily Perceptions

The second group of emotional theories we consider originates with William James and Carl Lange, who independently arrived at the idea that emotions are perceptions of bodily changes.[10] Fear, for example, might be defined as a perception of one's body preparing for flight. Some descendants of the James-Lange theory add the further requirement that our bodily feelings have formal objects.[11] Such a view would immediately fall prey to the first objection adduced against cognitive theories. The original James-Lange approach avoids this difficulty, along with the objection that people sometimes fail to articulate beliefs about why they love someone, indicating that love can be grounded in noncognitive representations of the beloved.

Can the James-Lange theory accommodate love? On such a view, love might be equated with the perception of one's bodily changes that take place in the presence of one's beloved. For example, a racing heart or sexual arousal. But here we encounter an obvious difficulty. Love, even when romantic, can be felt in the absence of arousal. There can be cozy and endearing feelings of love, longing feeling, even feelings of fury, occasioned by mistreatment by a lover. All of these are manifestations of love. Conversely, we can feel arousal in response to those we do not love. This is a problem that has no obvious fix. The problem is that love has a variable phenomenology.

3.3. Emotions as Perceptions of Value

Some authors have tried to avoid choosing between judgments and bodily perceptions, by equating emotions with a kind of perception that is closer to cognition, in some sense. We have in mind theories like those of de Sousa and Tappolet, who say that emotions are perceptions of value.[12] On this view, emotions are affective perceptions or patterns of salience that are triggered by various situations. So to be afraid is to see danger, to be angry is to perceive injustice. De Sousa argues further that emotional reactions are tied to paradigm scenarios for these emotions. Some of the emotional responses are innate but most are learned through upbringing and culture. The parallel drawn between emotions and perception is supposed to show that like perceptions, the content of emotions is not reducible to judgments or propositional attitudes, which allows the content to remain difficult to articulate, and there is no commitment to a unique bodily instantiation. Thus, the approach has some advantages over the previous theories when it comes to love.

On this view, to love would mean to perceive the beloved as lovable. Indeed, the metaphor of "seeing as" is often used in

describing love. The analyses of the perception of the beloved range from claiming it to be a complete delusion to an absolute clarity of vision. For instance, Stendhal in his *On Love* described the phenomenon of "crystallization" as follows:

> At the salt mines of Salzburg, they throw a leafless wintry bough into one of the abandoned workings. Two or three months later they haul it out covered with a shining deposit of crystals. The smallest twig, no bigger that a tom-tit's claw, is studded with a galaxy of scintillating diamonds. The original branch is no longer recognizable.
>
> What I have called crystallization is a mental process which draws from everything that happens new proofs of the perfection of the loved one.[13]

Just as an ordinary twig becomes a gem covered in beautiful crystals, so under the gaze of the lover the beloved transforms into a creature of divinity and perfection. Stendhal's view is that in love we reside under a constant illusion of the perfection of our beloved, never loving them for their true selves. Similarly, Freud explains this romantic idealization as *transference* of the feelings one actually feels for someone else.[14] Although transference is discussed in the context of psychoanalysis when the patient falls in love with her analyst, Freud maintains that there is not much difference between this kind of love, and romantic love in general. He says, "It is true that the [transference] love consists of new editions of old traits and that it repeats infantile reactions. But this is the essential character of every state of being in love. There is no such state which does not reproduce infantile prototypes. It is precisely from this infantile determination that it receives its compulsive character, verging as it does on the pathological."[15] According to Freud, when in love, one is reenacting some past experiences using beloveds as surrogates for the love attitudes.

On the other side of the spectrum is Irving Singer, who acknowledges the extreme idealization in love but denies that one is completely deluded about the beloved's true nature. Rather, love is an imaginative engagement with the beloved, in which one may not be blind to the shortcomings and faults of the beloved but perceive them *as* lovable.[16] J. David Velleman, on the other hand, claims that only in love the beloved is seen as she truly is. He says,

> Many of our defenses against being emotionally affected by another person are ways of not seeing what is most affecting about him. This contrived blindness to the other person is among the defenses that are lifted by love, with the result that we really look at him, perhaps for the first time, and respond emotionally in a way that's indicative of having really seen him.[17]

It is certainly true that in love one perceives the beloved as particularly lovable. The level of idealization of the beloved will probably depend on the lover, that is, their upbringing and the culture surrounding their perception of love. However, this idea faces a similar issue as we have seen with the theory that the emotions are reducible to beliefs and judgments. We criticized those theories on the ground that love seems to lack a formal object. Evaluative perception theories may try to get around this by capitalizing on the noncognitive nature of perception, insisting that there is no property we explicitly attribute to those we love. The phrase "perceiving as lovable" may look like a way to avoid the difficulty, but this is just a verbal trick. The perception analogy requires that emotions have aptness conditions. Where there is perception, there can also be illusion and error. Even the notion of idealization makes this clear, since idealization is a kind of distortion, and thus implies representing the beloved as having certain properties—properties they don't actually possess. But what are these properties? To answer with the word "lovability" offers little help.

Romantic love does not seem to have any aptness conditions. When asked why we love someone, we might mention positive

character traits or shared history, but these properties do not successfully justify love. Such factors are neither necessary nor sufficient, and the features we love need not be positive in any obvious sense. Often love is linked to highly quirky traits, like a braying laugh or weird taste in nail polish. A perceptual theory might seem well suited to accommodate this fact, since these traits often include details that are difficult to conceptualize. Crucially, however, these traits would not qualify as good reasons to love someone. They do not make love apt or inapt.

This raises another point. With perceptual states, aptness conditions are usually determined by causal relations. In particular, perceptual states represent features of the world that they reliably detect, and are said to be apt when triggered by the feature of the world that causes them under normal conditions. That would be a nonstarter in the case of love, since feelings of love can be triggered by an endless range of idiosyncratic quirks. Love lacks reliable causes, and that undermines the analogy between love and perception.

4. Basic Emotions and Emotion Complexes

We have been suggesting that love is not an emotion, if emotions are defined according to the leading theories. Before resting our case, however, we want to draw attention to another facet of emotion psychology, which bears on our argument: the distinction between basic emotions and more complex emotional constructs (including nonbasic emotions and sentiments). This distinction draws attention to other aspects of emotion theory that fail to align well with love. By showing that love fits the model of neither basic emotions nor emotion complexes, we can add further support to our conclusion.

4.1. Basic Emotions

Basic emotions are said to be basic in two senses: They are biologically prepared responses and they are not themselves made up of other emotions.[18] The contrast between basic and nonbasic emotions is illustrated by the difference between fear and nostalgia. Fear has been considered a basic emotion because it is present in human infants and nonhuman animals as an involuntary bodily response, also often characterized as innate, whereas nostalgia seems to require cognitive development.[19] In recent decades, the notion of basic emotion has mainly been developed by Paul Ekman, who has been studying facial expressions across cultures.[20] He argues that some emotions, such as anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and surprise, are universal, because when these emotions are induced, people of different cultures produce similar facial expressions, and when asked to identify an emotion by looking at a picture of a facial expression, their answers also turn out to be similar across cultures.[21] Ekman later argued that the unique signal that would signify a basic emotion need not be a facial expression. It could be a specific vocalization, or a distinct set of bodily movements.[22]

In addition to being characterized by a particular facial expression that goes together with a given emotion, the universality of basic emotions is confirmed by tracing their evolutionary origins as “affect programs” that have developed in humans and other species to cope with various aspects of the environment, and help the survival of the species.[23] Affect programs are characterized by a felt episode that lasts a short while, accompanied by changes in facial expression, posture, nervous system, hormonal system, and vocal changes. The system responsible for these changes is modular because the responses are quick, automatic, specific to a restricted domain of stimuli, and cognitively impenetrable.[24] Furthermore, the universality of these affect programs is also supported by identifying neural pathways special to every basic emotion.[25] In addition, basic emotions

are also said to be characterized by action tendencies as well as the idea that nonhuman animals can experience them.[26]

The idea that love is a basic emotion has a long history. Love can be found among Hobbes's "seven simple passions", and Descartes's list of six.[27] To assess this conjecture, let us see whether love can satisfy the requirements set out in contemporary basic emotion research. An expression of romantic love would have to be universal, produce a particular kind of action tendency, manifest itself in a love feeling, be present among nonhuman animals, could perhaps have a particular sort of facial expression or some other unique feature, serve a unique evolutionary function, and be identified with a unique neural pathway. Helen Fisher argues that romantic love is a basic emotion.[28] According to an anthropological study by Jankowiak and Fischer that she and many others cite, 88.5 percent of the sampled cultures indicate presence of romantic love.[29] This finding is cited in support of claiming that romantic love, if not a universal, is a near universal. Furthermore, Fisher argues that there is a unique facial expression of love—a special gaze with googly eyes transfixed on the object of one's love. She thinks that this special gaze can be recognized among nonhuman animals as well as humans. According to Darwin, too, romantic love among humans has a special physiological pattern such as the lovers' "hearts beat quickly, their breathing is hurried, and their faces flash."[30] The action tendency identified with romantic love is the seeking of proximity and intimacy. Fisher observes that many animals "pat, nuzzle, coo, and gaze at one another affectionately as they court."[31] Furthermore, Fisher argues that romantic love's evolutionary function is to serve as a link between two other basic emotional systems—lust and attachment. These two are supposed to work together to ensure gene perpetuation in certain species.[32] While lust's function is to fulfill an organism's sexual desire and achieve conception of offspring, attachment between two adults ensures that the offspring receive the care necessary for their survival. Romantic love with its obsessive passionate nature helps to concentrate on a specific individual, attending to them exclusively, and over time forming an emotional bond that would motivate for the pair to stay together and care for the young. Additionally, Fisher and her colleagues attempt to identify neural pathways that would show love to be a unique basic intrinsic neural system.

Fisher makes a strong case for the basicness of romantic love. However, the conclusions she draws are not convincing. For instance, even if romantic love is present in most human cultures, it does not mean that it is a basic emotion, since a higher cognitive emotion like nostalgia may be common to many cultures too. Nostalgia involves sadness and joy directed at the past. Furthermore, is the look of love distinct? It seems to be very similar to awe and admiration. This is probably why love does not end up on Ekman's list even though he has been searching for basic emotions for fifty years, and he has expanded his list from six to fifteen.[33]

One might argue for the basicness of love by pointing to nonhuman animals. For example, they engage elaborate courtship rituals and some species exhibit long-term bonding. This evidence is far from decisive. Courtship is about securing a sexual partner, and, even in the human case, this may have little to do with love. Among mammals, long-term pair bonding is rare. It does not occur in chimpanzees, our closest relatives. Gorillas form plural bonds, but these seem to be governed by rules of power rather than deep affection; females have a breeding hierarchy and they readily mate with new males when the alpha in their group is replaced. Furthermore, nonhuman species that do form pair bonds, including many birds, do not exhibit sexual exclusivity, and they quickly look for new partners when the old one dies. This is not to say that animals never grieve loss, but most cases (usually anecdotal) concern relatives rather than sexual partners.

Even in human beings, the relationship between romantic love and pair bonding is inconsistent and complex.[34] Our history seems to show that love is not sufficient or necessary for long-term pair bonds. Monogamy is a recent invention that became prevalent with rise of agriculture, while communal marriages, polygyny, and group child rearing used to be a lot more

common.[35] Furthermore, arranged marriages have also been the norm, and marriage based on romantic love is as recent as eighteenth century.[36] While, romantic love historically has been deemed as distractive to social order, humankind has successfully procreated and cared for its young without romantic love ever entering into the household.

The last aspect of the basicness of love is the unique neural pathway it may be identified with. Although the research on the neural correlates of romantic love is in its infancy, Bartels and Zeki argue that they have identified such a pathway by monitoring neural activity in subjects who were shown pictures of their beloveds as well as their good friends of the same sex and age.[37] The contrast between lovers and friends identified the neural differences between love and friendship. However, Bartles and Zeki acknowledge that romantic love is a complex phenomenon that involves sexual, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components, and for that reason there are many cognitive systems involved in its realization. They think that romantic love is not an emotion but a sentiment, which we discuss later.

There is also a more general worry about the effort to equate love with a basic emotion. As noted, basic emotions are brief. They are states that arise in response to a (real or ideational) stimulus, in order to cope with it here and now. As noted at the outset, love is not a passing state. It can endure for long periods, even when not currently manifest; it is, in this sense, dispositional.

4.2. Nonbasic Emotions

Another category contender for romantic love may be nonbasic emotions. These are often characterized as blends of basic emotions. For example, despair may be a blend of fear and sadness, whereas contempt may be a blend of anger and disgust.[38] Still, some such blends may have been achieved through the process of evolution, and in that sense may be innate. On the other hand, some blends have to be acquired through an exposure to culture. Another type of nonbasic emotions are emotions that are subject to calibration, a process wherein a more basic emotion comes to be triggered by new elicitors.[39] This happens when an emotion comes under the control of acquired beliefs. For example, feelings of patriotism may be an extension of pride acquired when people are socialized to believe that their identities are linked to nationality and that their nations have a privileged status. There can also be calibrated blends. For example, jealousy may be anger, sadness, and disgust triggered by the belief that the affections of one's partner are directed at a third party, and shame is disgust triggered by the belief that one has failed in some important way. Both calibration and blending are influenced by culture. For example, cultures inculcate different views about what warrants jealousy and shame.

Could love be a nonbasic emotion? In earlier work, Prinz suggests that romantic love is a combination of lust and attachment.[40] This suggestion does not hold up to scrutiny. Many psychologists have distinguished romantic love from lust and attachment. Romantic love is sometimes thought of as infatuation, or being *in* love. Helen Fisher uses the term "attraction" to identify this phenomenon, whereas Dorothy Tennov uses the word "limerence" to refer to it. Lust is characterized as sexual desire, which can be short-lived, can be satisfied, and its target is fungible. In contrast, romantic love is characterized as an obsessive passionate state that has a normal shelf life of about eighteen months to four years, and its targets are deemed to be nonfungible.[41] Attachment is characterized by a much more calm kind of state that can last one's lifetime; it is something that appears after romantic love comes into existence, provided that it succeeds in forming a relationship. All three of these can exist separately. Interestingly, people who report being in romantic love often deny that they experience intense sexual desire for the objects of their love. Likewise, people in attachment relationships often lack sexual desire toward their partners. Therefore, all three of these states can exist separately, even though sometimes they are found to coexist.[42]

If love is not a blended emotion, might it be a calibrated emotion? What sort of beliefs might accompany its triggering? Some possibilities may include, physical attractiveness, good character the person possesses, potentially good parent for one's future offspring. But do any of these thoughts guarantee falling in love? It seems not. As a matter of fact, upon recognizing that a given person is physically attractive, possesses good character, and will be a good parent for one's offspring, one may find oneself regretting not feeling love toward them. Love's presence and absence does not seem to be consistently correlated with any such thoughts.

4.3. Sentiments

We have argued that love is neither a basic nor a nonbasic emotion. This conclusion is based in part of the fact that there is no single affect program or a small fixed group of blended emotions that is manifested in every state of love. In addition, love is not a briefly experienced state, but more like an enduring disposition. There is another kind of complex emotion construct that gets around these worries. It may be suggested that love is a *sentiment*. In fact, the literature on sentiments tends to use love (and hate) as a paradigm example.[43]

"Sentiment" is a term of the trade, and there are some subtle differences in the ways in which it is used. In defining sentiments Deonna and Teroni suggest that they are dispositions directed at specific individual things rather than simply values as in the case of character traits.[44] They say, "Sentiments are often traceable to repeated emotional interactions with their objects, an ebb and flow of episodes, which through a process of sedimentation settle into distinctive longstanding affective orientations towards them."[45] Sentiments explain the importance one assigns to a particular object, and serve as motivational states with respect to that object. Similarly, Bennett Helm's example of hopefulness illustrates the structure of a sentiment, "Thus, if you are hopeful that some end can be achieved, then you normally ought also to be afraid when its accomplishment is threatened, relieved when the threat does not materialize, angry at those who intentionally obstruct progress toward it, and satisfied when you finally achieve it (or disappointed when you fail); moreover it would be inconsistent with these emotions to be afraid of achieving the goal, grateful toward those who sabotage it, and so on."[46] Thus sentiments represent a particular kind of import of a given object, and provide a rational structure to the possible emotions produced by the triggering of this sentiment.

Nico Frijda thinks that sentiments are affective dispositions that explain people's propensities to react affectively in different situations.[47] Frijda suggests that sentiments can capture individual idiosyncrasies of these responses. He points out that most sentiments are acquired through experiences and social learning, but some, like feeling disgusted by the sight of blood, are innate.

Frijda proposes two ways in which sentiments may be understood. First, they can be thought of as cognitive schemas whose content produces an appraisal when triggered by a given object. The schemas can also be activated by being reminded of the object, and not necessarily encountering it. Secondly, sentiments are dispositions that produce emotions, which constitute action readiness with respect to a given object. They are "latent motivations" that get realized in the emotions produced. For example, the sentiment of hate can trigger the desire to hurt the hated or feel happy upon discovering the suffering of the hated produced by something else.

For Prinz, sentiments are dispositions that manifest themselves in different occurrent emotions.[48] A paradigm case is liking. If you like someone, you are happy when you see them, sad when you say goodbye, delighted when good things happen to them, envious of those who spend more time with them, and so on. Suggesting that romantic love is a sentiment, therefore, looks like a

good way of addressing the issue of the variety of manifestations of romantic love. For example, rather than saying love is a blend of lust and attachment, one can say that these are among the various states toward which love can dispose us. These different manifestations may come and go in context-sensitive ways.

This proposal fits with Dorothy Tennov's finding that love can be experienced in different ways. She has collected numerous accounts of people being in love, which commonly share reports of intense longing, desire for unity and reciprocation from the beloved, extreme elation upon seeing the beloved person, anxiety from being uncertain about the feelings of the beloved, deep depression upon realization of never being able to see them again or be with them. Tennov also describes an attachment phase of love that disposes us to a different set of calmer emotions.[49]

We have two main qualms with this proposal. First, it is too narrow. At their core, sentiments are emotional dispositions. The dispositions that constitute love go beyond emotions to include thought patterns and behaviors as well. People in love tend to think obsessively about their partners,[50] and they are motivated to engage in courtship behaviors, and even to form long-term plans, such as the decision to cohabitate. If someone reported that she never thought about her partner when they were not together, we would doubt that she was in love. Second, like emotions, sentiments are characteristically stimulus-bound: They are triggered when we are presented with, or caused to think about, their target. They do not tend to arise in us spontaneously when their targets are not made salient. Love is less reactive. We might ruminate or pine for the ones we love without a prompting. We might be consumed by love, or we form regular desires to check in on those we love, or we might, on having new experiences, wonder how they would respond.

5. Love as a Syndrome

We have been arguing that love is not an emotion. What is it then? The answer we prefer was influentially formulated by James Averill. He proposes that love is a "syndrome."[51]

5.1. Syndromes and Social Constructionism

Averill defines a syndrome as "an organized set of responses (behavioral, physiological, and/or cognitive)", and he specifies, "[t]he specific responses need not be, in-and-of-themselves, emotional."[52] He focuses on several features of the love syndrome, including: "(a) idealization of the loved one; (b) suddenness of onset ('love at first sight'); (c) physiological arousal; and (d) commitment to, and willingness to make sacrifices for, the loved one."[53] We find this approach attractive, but we want to resist two aspects of the way it is developed in Averill's work. First, he goes on to focus on the idea that love is a social construction, and, in developing that proposal, he shifts from talk of syndromes to talk of scripts. Second, he claims that all emotions are syndromes, thus his syndrome theory of love conceives of love as an emotion.

Let us begin with Averill's brand of social constructionism. In recent decades a popular view among some historians, philosophers, and sociologists has been that romantic love is an invention of Western civilization.[54] Defending the tradition of social constructionism of emotions, James Averill cites Henry Theophilus Finck in identifying three characteristics of love. First, romantic love consists of a complex varying set of feelings, attitudes, and sentiments. Second, not everyone has the ability to love. A person needs to be *taught* about romantic love to be able to love. Romantic love is a fairly recent invention of the Middle

Ages that is dated back to Dante first falling in love in 1274. Averill explains the idealization of the beloved by pointing to what he takes to be the historical origins of romantic love, when the female beloved of a knight was representative of the Virgin Mary, while the love between them was extramarital and forbidden.

Averill develops this idea by describing love as a cultural script. The script is something we enact, though it seems to us passive and automatic. Love scripts differ depending on the place and time. To understand the syndrome of love, one needs to identify paradigm cases of love provided by one's culture. Among other things, this means that culture provides an idea of who it is that one should fall in love with. For example, it is considered inappropriate to fall in love with somebody who is not yet an adult, someone with whom one has a big age difference, or someone who is nonhuman. For a long time in our culture it has been considered inappropriate to fall in love with somebody of one's own sex.

A related idea is defended by Robert Nozick. Although Nozick never puts the point in terms of love being a script, he defines love as a desire to form a "we"—the desire to merge oneself with the other person in such a way that the two people create a superidentity in which one cares for the well-being of the beloved as one would for one's own.[55] He describes the way in which romantic relationship progresses first from infatuation in which the lover is attracted to the beloved on the basis of their intrinsic properties, to love that transcends these qualities such that the beloved is loved as an end in themselves and for who they are. The interaction between the lovers is manifested in the division of labor, in caring for one another, and appearing to the world as one unit, a couple, a "we." If all goes well the couple will get married and have children. This is a typical way in which romantic relationships are perceived in our culture—they are supposed to progress from dating to living together, to getting married and having children. He even points out the gender differences in romantic love, which illustrate the cultural stereotypes: For men love is one project among many projects they pursue, for women love is everything. That, Averill, would say, is just part of the script.

We think Nozick and Averill push the script idea too far. We agree that the love syndrome is heavily shaped by culture. For example, cultures differ in the degree to which love is associated with sex and also with marriage.[56] But there is no reason to infer that love is nothing more than a script. Some of the emotional dimensions of love are robust cross-culturally, and these may have deep biological roots.[57] Averill does not deny that biological responses, such as lust, can be dimensions of love, but his script metaphor misleadingly implies that love is a mere act that could have taken any form. We also resist his claim that emotions are scripts. Emotions may have culturally prescribed behaviors associated with them, but they can often be characterized apart from these behaviors. Unlike love, some emotions have biological substrates that arise in almost all instances and across all cultures.

5.2. The Syndrome of Love

The idea that love is a syndrome has been picked up by some other authors, who place less emphasis on the script metaphor. One of its most eloquent defenders is Ronald de Sousa, who says that love is, "a *syndrome*: not a kind of feeling, but an intricate pattern of potential thoughts, behaviors, and emotions that tend to 'run together.'"[58] De Sousa presents a balanced view of both cultural and biological aspects of love. We think this approach is right, and we want to elaborate on it, with special reference to the objections we have been raising against emotion theories.

The notion of a syndrome comes with clinical associations, as the term is often used to describe mental disorders. Both Averill and de Sousa embrace this, and we do as well. Think, for example of the criteria used to diagnose depression. Such criteria have

several features that deserve attention. First, they are disjunctive, and thus two people with the same diagnosis can have very different symptoms. Second, these include emotions, thoughts, and behaviors, such as low mood, negative self-regard, and loss of appetite. Third, these symptoms can be context sensitive: Some lose weight when depressed, while others gain weight, and children's symptoms differ from adults. Fourth, syndromes like this are not believed to have formal objects: low mood is not a symptom of depression if it is the result of bereavement, for example, so depression need not track anything in the world. Fifth, for this reason, syndromes like depression can be described as arational, rather than rational or irrational. Clinical depression is insensitive to reason, so it cannot be described as a mistaken state of mind. Sixth, syndromes can manifest themselves in symptoms in ways that are decoupled from the environment; depression can have its effects even when no depressing stimulus is present. Finally, though depression is not a mere cultural script, it can be culturally influenced. For example, in some cultures bodily discomfort is more often reported than low mood. In some cases, the components of a syndrome co-occur because of some underlying pathology, but they can also be bound together by cultural norms. For example, the excessive guilt that often accompanies depression might arise because of cultural expectations that people be cheerful and productive.

If we take these seven aspects of clinical syndromes as a model, we can see that the syndrome theory of love has great advantages over theories that identify love as an emotion. Let us review our objections, and see how they can be circumvented by the syndrome theory. When applied to love, *cognitive theories* of emotion commit, implausibly, to the thesis that love has a formal object. Syndromes, such as depression, do not. If emotions are *evaluative perceptions*, then the thesis that love is an emotion entails that love has aptness conditions. We argued against this, noting that love is often associated with quirky traits, which vary from one person to the next. Syndromes, too, lack aptness conditions. *Bodily theories* of emotion could not extend to love, because love is not associated with any single bodily state. This is also true of syndromes; for example, a depressed individual can feel sleepy or incapable of sleep. We argued that love is not a *basic emotion* on the grounds that it is not innate and not limited to brief episodes. The same can be said of syndromes. They show signs of learning, as with learned-helplessness theories of depression, and they can last for years. Against the view that love is an *emotion blend*, we noted that love lacks fixed components. Syndromes, too, can be instantiated in different ways. Love is also unlike *calibrated emotions*, which operate under control of beliefs in response to specific elicitors. Syndromes such as depression are, similarly, not governed by specific beliefs or elicitors. We said that love is not a *sentiment* because its dispositional structure encompasses beliefs and behaviors as well as feelings. This is a defining attribute of syndromes. In addition, unlike sentiments, syndromes are not stimulus bound; they are manifested in symptoms without being triggered by current inputs impinging on an organism.

All this argues for our thesis that love is a syndrome. The features of syndromes that we identified correspond to some of the main differences between syndromes and emotions, and those differences align with some of our main reasons for rejecting the thesis that love is an emotion. The parallels between love and paradigm cases of syndromes are remarkable. It also accounts for the fact that love is often compared to psychiatric disorder. We can attribute love by saying someone is "crazy" about her lover, and we describe people as "madly in love."

The analogy gets a further boost from the final feature of syndromes that we mentioned in our analysis: Syndromes can be culturally inflected. Love is associated with somewhat different dispositions in different cultures as well. This, in fact, is precisely what motivated Averill's proposal that love is a syndrome. At the same time, we resist his claim that love is merely a *script*. Here too, ironically, the syndrome account helps. A syndrome such as depression can vary across cultures, but many of its components have deep biological roots. Depression affects core biological systems, such as appetite and sleep, and we see depressive symptoms in nonhuman animals. The caged tiger that paces incessantly and refuses to eat is not simply acting out a

script. The syndrome view allows us to accommodate that plasticity of love—its sensitivity to culture and context—without assuming that it is just a role that was written for us by our culture in the recent past.

We conclude that love is a syndrome. In making this case, we drew on an analogy between love and psychiatric disorders. The comparison helps to underscore the ways in which love differs from emotions. We do not want to imply that love is pathological or problematic. But we do think love is both idiosyncratic and interestingly insensitive to reason in ways that can be lost if we classify it as an emotion. Love is not a detector of properties; it is a way of being in the world.

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([9]) For a detailed discussion, see de Sousa, *Love: A Very Short Introduction*, especially ch. 4.

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([31]) Fisher, *Anatomy of Love*, 51.

([32]) See also Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience*.

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([34]) See J. Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss: Vol. 2: Separation* (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1973), on the discussion of attachment forming in humans and primates.

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