

Sample Book Review

Your Name, PSYC 2306, Section/Synonym #

Bibliography

Lewis, T., Amini, F., & Lannon, R. (2000) *A general theory of love*. New York: Vintage Books.

Information about the authors

Drs. Lewis, Amini, and Lannon are psychiatrists who have been working together since 1991. Each comes from a different generation of emphasis. Dr. Amini from one in which psychoanalysis reigned unchallenged, Dr. Lannon from one which introduced psychoactive medication, and Dr. Lewis from an era that merged psychodynamics with neuroscience.

Thomas Lewis, M.D., is an Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the University of California, San Francisco, School of Medicine and former Associate Director of the Affective Disorders Program there. He also has a private practice.

Fari Amini, M.D., was born and raised in Iran. He graduated from the UCSF School of Medicine, where he has served on the faculty for almost 4 decades, and is currently a Professor of Psychiatry. He has also served on the faculty and is a past president of the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Institute.

Richard Lannon, M.D., is an Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the UCSF School of Medicine, where he founded the Affective Disorders Program, which integrates psychological concepts with brain biology.

Main points (thesis) of the book

- Throughout the life span, love is a focus of human experience which affects moods, bodily rhythms, and the structure of the brain.
- Love makes us who we are and who we can become.
- Emotions have a biological function – they do something for an animal that helps it to live.
- Facial expressions are identical in every culture and every human being.
- A mood is a state of enhanced readiness to experience a certain emotion. Researchers have yet to determine what causes the brain to get stuck on a single emotion, and getting it unstuck is a real challenge.
- Once the limbic system has settled on an emotional state, it stimulates the neocortical parts of the brain which spawns conscious thoughts. In other words, the limbic system collects sensory information, filters it for emotional relevance, and sends outputs to other brain areas.
- When two individuals gaze into each others eyes, there is a mutual exchange of limbic stimulation. Hugging can create similar effects.
- If the limbic system is not stimulated through various senses like touch, adverse effects result. Limbic regulation is life sustaining. This is why pets can make people not only feel better but also live longer.
- To sustain a relationship, limbic regulation demands sensory inputs that are rich, vivid, and frequent (e.g., send letters and make phone calls to the people you love).
- The number of couples who marry is a fraction of many who find each other physically interesting. Most people are extremely particular in regards to who they will accept as a spouse.
- The brain cannot reliably distinguish between recorded experience and internal fantasy. Consequently, turning psychotherapy into a treasure hunt for the explicit past is a misguided endeavor.
- Who we are and who we become depends, in part, on whom we love. Lovers hold the keys to each other's identities.

Evaluation (how the authors support the thesis)

This is a highly technical book that attempts to integrate love as described by everyone from poets to parents with neurobiology. In the process, the authors cite over 200 references including everyone from notable psychological researcher Carroll Izard, who has studied the relationship between facial expressions and internal physiological reactions to emotions, to theorists like Charles Darwin to novelists (e.g., Ernest Hemingway, e.e.cummings, Henry David Thoreau) to psychoanalysts (e.g., Sigmund Freud). The bibliography is nothing less than a who's who of award winning experimental psychologists (e.g., David Hubel and Thorstan Wiesel, Harry Harlow). This may be exciting for the academically inclined but it is no paperback manual (i.e., self-help book) for the lonely individual looking for love who may be attracted to the title, which the publicist claims will forever change the way you think about human intimacy.