Is love a "basic" emotion?

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Abstract
This article documents the neglect of love in many contemporary emotion theories, despite its prominence in the lay psychology of emotion. We argue that love should be considered a basic emotion, like anger, sadness, happiness, and fear. We discuss the criteria that various theorists use to distinguish basic from nonbasic emotions, and we marshal arguments and evidence from a variety of sources suggesting that love fits the criteria for basicness. We conclude that a number of controversies over the status of love can be resolved by distinguishing between the momentary surge form of love, a basic emotion having properties similar to joy, sadness, fear, etc., and relational love, a bond that develops between people, associated with states that include not only surge love, but many other emotions such as distress and anxiety. Finally, we suggest that "love" is the broad, everyday name for emotions related to three interrelated behavioral systems discussed by Bowlby (1979): attachment, caregiving, and sex.

Many contemporary theories of emotion identify a relatively small set of "basic" or fundamental emotions, usually including happiness, surprise, anger, sadness, and fear. The number of purportedly basic emotions varies from theory to theory, as do the criteria for deciding whether a particular emotion warrants basic status. But most contemporary emotion theorists (e.g., Ekman, Frijda, Izard, Oatley, and Johnson-Laird) do not include love in their lists of basic emotions; as a consequence, love receives less attention from emotion researchers than its place in everyday life would lead one to expect. Theorists offer several reasons for excluding love: that it is a mixture of other emotions such as joy, anxiety, and jealousy (Izard, 1991); that it is a sentiment or attitude rather than an emotion (Ekman, 1992; Frijda, Mesquita, Sonnemans, & van Goozen, 1991); that, unlike happiness, sadness, and irritability, it cannot occur without an "object" (Oatley & Johnson-Laird, 1987); and that it, like jealousy and certain other states, is a multiperson "plot" rather than a basic emotion (Ekman, 1984, 1992).

The omission of love from most contemporary lists of basic emotions stands in sharp contrast to studies (e.g., Fehr & Russell, 1984; Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O'Connor, 1987; Shaver, Wu, & Schwartz, 1992) showing that love is one of the most prototypical emotions in the minds of laypersons. To the present authors, whether we think of ourselves as social psychologists interested in close relationships or as people involved in relationships of our own, it seems odd that love—the subject of so many emotional poems, songs, and life stories—fails to achieve basic status. Although at first glance the issue of love's basic or nonbasic status may seem insignificant, it actually matters a great deal to the psychology of emotion. Because most theorists focus exclusively on "basic" emotions, love is
often ignored in emotion research. Many questionnaire measures (e.g., the Differential Emotions Scale; Izard, Dougherty, Bloxom, & Kotsch, 1974) and laboratory procedures for eliciting emotions fail to include love. Similarly, Scherer and Wallbott's (1994) recent worldwide study of cross-cultural similarities and differences in emotional experience says nothing about love. Many recent emotion textbooks and theoretical overviews (e.g., Reeve, 1992; Scherer & Ekman, 1984) do not list "love" in their indexes, and others (e.g., Izard, 1991) address it near the end as something that cannot be ignored, but fails to fit comfortably into the author's conceptual scheme.

In the present article, we take a close look at the status of love in contemporary theories of emotion and at the criteria used to exclude it from lists of basic emotions. We believe there is a plausible argument against every major reason for not considering love to be a fundamental emotion and a coherent way to account for love's special characteristics.

The Absence of Love from Lists of Basic Emotions

Table 1, adapted from Ortony and Turner (1990), contains several representative lists of theoretically basic emotions. Although the lists differ in content and length, most have in common their omission of love. Although early emotion theorists such as James (1884) and Watson (1930) included love in their lists of fundamental emotions, most present-day theorists do not. Over the years, Ekman (1992) has liberalized his criteria for basic emotions and consequently has entertained the possibility that what was once the only positive emotion in his list, "happiness" or "enjoyment," may be analyzable into several discrete emotions (e.g., amusement, contentment, excitement, pride in achievement, relief, satisfaction, sensory pleasure). But he still omits love. Lazarus (1991), perhaps because his theory is organized around "core relational themes" rather than facial expressions, is a rare exception (see Table 1). If emotions are conceptualized in terms of appraised and felt relationships between a person and objects, people, or events in the environment, it is difficult to ignore love, an emotion evoked in relation to a particular other. Roseman's (1994) theory, which is similar to Lazarus's, distinguishes among 17 basic emotions, including love (see Table 1). Like Lazarus, Roseman places relatively little defining emphasis on facial expressions. Both Roseman and Lazarus emphasize the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Basic or Fundamental Emotions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ekman, Friesen, &amp; Ellsworth (1982)</td>
<td>anger, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, surprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekman (1992)</td>
<td>anger, disgust, fear, sadness, and enjoyment (which may include several distinct positive emotions), and perhaps contempt, surprise, guilt, interest, shame, embarrassment, awe, and excitement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Izard (1991)</td>
<td>anger, contempt, disgust, sadness, enjoyment-joy, fear, interest-excitement, surprise-astonishment (and possibly guilt, shame, and shyness)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lazarus (1991)</td>
<td>anger, fright-anxiety, guilt-shame, sadness, envy-jealousy, disgust, happiness-joy, pride, love-affection, and relief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oatley &amp; Johnson-Laird (1987)</td>
<td>anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panksepp (1992)</td>
<td>expectancy, fear, rage, panic (and possibly joy, lust, nurturance, greed, and dominance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roseman (1994)</td>
<td>anger, contempt, disgust, dislike, distress, fear, frustration, guilt, hope, joy, pride, regret, relief, sadness, shame, surprise, love</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: Aspects of this table are adapted from Table 1 of Ortony and Turner (1990).
cognitive appraisals that characterize each emotion and the complex action tendencies elicited by these appraisals.

Interestingly, even theorists who conceptualize emotions in terms of a circumplex and who use a large number of terms to label regions of the emotion space fail to include love. Using two slightly different lists, Russell (1980, 1983), for example, created a circumplex representation of emotion based on two abstract dimensions: pleasure–displeasure and arousal–sleep. His large set of emotion terms included “afraid, alarmed, alert, angry, annoyed, aroused, astonished, at ease, bad-tempered, bored, calm, content, delighted, depressed, disappointed, discouraged, distressed, droopy, excited, frustrated, glad, gloomy, happy, hurt, miserable, pleased, relaxed, sad, satisfied, serene, sleepy, tense, tired, and troubled”—but not loving, in love, tender, or affectionate. In a similar analysis, but one focusing on positive affect and negative affect as independent dimensions rather than Russell’s pleasure and arousal dimensions, Watson and Tellegen (1985) labeled sections of the emotion space “active, aroused, astonished, at rest, blue, calm, content, distressed, drowsy, dull, elated, enthusiastic, excited, fearful, grouchy, happy, hostile, jittery, kindly, lonely, nervous, peppy, placid, pleased, quiescent, quiet, relaxed, sad, satisfied, scornful, sleepy, sluggish, sorry, still, strong, surprised, unhappy, and warmhearted”—but again, not loving or in love.

Love Is a Basic Emotion in the Minds of Laypersons

The connections between experts’ psychological concepts and everyday or “folk” psychological concepts is especially important in the study of emotion: researchers have not freed themselves from everyday concepts, and it is not clear that they ever will or in fact should. No psychologist knows what anger, fear, or shame are independent of folk knowledge, and most studies of these emotions test hypotheses derived from intuition and everyday observations of self and others. If emotion theorists borrow heavily from everyday knowledge about emotions but ignore love, they should have good reasons for the omission. Moreover, the more central love is to the ordinary conception of emotion, the better the reasons psychologists should have for leaving it out.

Fehr and Russell (1984) asked 200 Canadian subjects to “list as many examples as you can of the category EMOTION.” No special definition of “emotion” was provided. The top six (out of 196) emotions listed by at least two subjects were: happiness (listed by 152 people), anger (149), sadness (136), love (124), fear (96), and hate (89). Other emotions viewed as basic by many emotion theorists were mentioned by only a few subjects—e.g., disgust (27), surprise (17), shame (4), and contempt (2). In a second study, Fehr and Russell asked subjects to read a list of psychological states (e.g., dizziness, anger, stubbornness, love, alertness) that contained a number of emotions taken from the top 20 terms generated in the previous study. Subjects were asked to generate a category name for each state, and the seven states most often labeled “emotion” were: sadness (66.7%), love (60.0%), happiness (60.0%), anger (56.7%), hate (50.0%), joy (50.0%), and fear (46.7%). By both methods, therefore—listing examples of the emotion category and providing a category name for several emotions—love proved to be a prototypical emotion.

In a third study, Fehr and Russell presented a new group of subjects with the 20 most frequently named emotion terms from their first study and asked the subjects to rate each item on a 1 to 6 scale ranging from “an extremely poor example of emotion” to “an extremely good example of emotion.” The average ratings of the seven terms considered the best examples of “emotion” were: love (5.46 out of 6), hate (5.26), anger (5.15), sadness (5.04), happiness (5.00), joy (4.89), and fear (4.78). (Disgust, considered by many theorists to be a basic emotion, ranked 15th out of 20, with a mean of 3.71.) Shaver et al. (1987) conducted a similar study using many more
emotion terms and involving American rather than Canadian subjects. They had subjects rate terms on a 4-point scale ranging from “I definitely would not call this an emotion” to “I definitely would call this an emotion.” Once again “love” was given the highest rating, with the top six emotions being love (3.94), anger (3.90), hate (3.84), fear (3.83), happiness (3.77), and sadness (3.68). Finally, in a study of word frequencies in printed English, love appears more frequently than any other emotion term, both as a noun and as a verb (Frances & Kucera, 1982). Love was listed 179 times as a noun and 145 times as a verb, compared with the following frequencies, respectively, for other common emotion terms: fear (141 and 53), surprise (49 and 76), anger (48 and 1), joy (47 and 0), happiness (23 and 0), sadness (6 and 1), and hate (10 and 66).

The fact that love is a common or familiar emotion does not in itself dictate that it is basic in the minds of ordinary perceivers. Shaver et al. (1987) explored the possibility that love and other emotions might be “cognitively basic” (in Rosch’s, 1978, sense) by asking subjects to sort 135 prototypical emotions into groups of similar or closely related emotional states. One of the six major clusters to emerge from this sort was a family of love-related terms such as “love,” “affection,” “tenderness,” and “infatuation.” This sort indicates that love is indeed a cognitively basic category, along with only a few other emotions: happiness, anger, sadness, fear, and possibly surprise. Oddly enough, love is the only emotion in that handful that gets systematically excluded from contemporary lists of basic emotions.

**Emotion Theorists’ Criteria for Basic Emotions**

Given that most people consider love to be an important, prototypical, and cognitively basic emotion, on what grounds do theorists exclude it from lists of basic emotions? Ekman (1984) initially proposed that emotions meet the following 10 criteria: (1) a distinctive pan-cultural signal, (2) phylloge-
Love as a basic emotion

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this criterion because "too little is known about how subjectivity maps on to other aspects of an emotional experience" (p. 175). (Notice, however, that the term "experience" implies subjectivity.)

Oatley and Johnson-Laird (1987; see also Oatley, 1992) used at least four criteria to determine which emotions are basic. Three of these were very similar to the criteria used by Ekman and Izard: (1) distinctive eliciting conditions, (2) physiological specificity, and (3) cross-culturally universal expressions. The fourth criterion was unique and therefore received more extensive commentary: (4) experiences that are phenomenological primitives—states that cannot be analyzed further. Nonbasic emotions, which are designated by what Oatley (1992) calls "contextual emotion terms," can be further analyzed. They can be broken down into basic emotions plus information about causes, objects, relationships, and self-evaluations. According to this analysis, "love," "jealousy," and "pride" refer to one or more basic emotions in particular kinds of causal contexts. One advantage of this analysis, according to Oatley, is that it can explain moods fairly directly: moods are basic emotions that "recycle" or continue for a period of time with no apparent cause (i.e., no obvious object). It is possible, according to Oatley, to wake up in the morning and say, "I feel sad today, but I don't know why," whereas it would be odd to say, "I feel love today, but I don't know why." Love (like disgust and contempt, among many other emotions) requires a target or object.

According to Panksepp (1992), what other theorists call basic emotions are actually manifestations of innate "executive neural systems" that are identifiable in the brain. These systems "instigate and orchestrate the various facets of a coherent set of emotive responses (physiological, behavioral, and psychological)" (p. 555). Panksepp seems confident about the existence of four such systems: expectancy, fear, rage, and panic. Interestingly, the systems seem to be more complicated than the single emotion labels he applies to them. Of most relevance to the present article, the system Panksepp labels "panic" is associated with at least two emotive responses: (1) the panic and distress that occur when a young animal is separated from its parent; and (2) the positive feelings accompanying successful proximity maintenance (e.g., a duckling following its parent, a young primate riding on its parent's shoulder). The panic system is directly linked to distress vocalization and to other behaviors associated with successful parent-offspring proximity maintenance. This system therefore appears to be quite similar (if not identical) to the proximity maintenance system labeled "attachment" by Bowlby (1969, 1979). By referring only to the negative emotional side of the "panic" system, Panksepp ignores the possibility that the positive side is a form of love. Hence, love is neither named nor explicitly studied.

How Do Theorists Characterize Love if Not as a Basic Emotion?

Most emotion theorists mention love, but emphasize that its characteristics prevent it from being a basic emotion. Ekman (1984, 1992), for example, labels grief, jealousy, and infatuation (a form of love) as "plots" rather than emotions, because their defining context includes more than one person as well as particular kinds of roles and situations. Infatuation involves at least two people, as does grief; and jealousy involves three. For each of these feeling states there is a characteristic story or script (person 1 begins to fall impulsively or fatuously in love with person 2; person 1 loses person 2; person 1 is aware of a rival for person 2's affection). In Ekman's estimation, an experience that requires this much social context cannot be a basic emotion. (However, this criterion has not kept Ekman from proposing that contempt is a basic emotion, even though contempt involves at least two people and a "script" according to which one person judges—or "looks down his nose"—at another).

Another possible strategy is to emphasize love's dispositional (long-lasting) qual-
ity, which supposedly distinguishes it from momentary emotions such as amusement or disgust. Frijda et al. (1991) call love a sentiment, “a disposition to respond emotionally to a certain object” (p. 207). The term “love” is used this way when a woman reports that she loves her husband, even when she is currently annoyed with him or perhaps is not feeling much of anything toward him. Frijda et al. go on to say that “affections and aversions towards individuals or groups are sentiments, [as] are emotionally charged attitudes towards issues and political entities” (p. 207). Ekman (1992) has pursued this strategy, too, referring to love and hatred as “emotional attitudes” because they are “more sustained [than the states he classifies as emotions] and typically involve more than one emotion” (p. 194).

The last clause of Ekman’s statement introduces still another conceptual strategy: viewing love not as a pure emotion, but as a mixture of more basic emotions. According to Izard (1991):

Love is perhaps the strongest of all the phenomena in the domain of emotions, . . . but it is not a discrete emotion like joy or sadness. There are certain times when our love for someone puts us in situations in which we experience sadness. This may be due to a disappointment or separation, but it is because of our love relationship that we feel the sadness. We also know that the one we love can make us very angry. Some people think their greatest frustrations and their most intense anger are elicited by people they love. What I am suggesting is that the intense involvement between two people who love each other makes possible the arousal of strong emotions of several varieties. (p. 394)

These observations are all accurate enough, but Izard seems not to consider that anger as well as love can “put us in situations in which we experience sadness,” just as being repeatedly frightened by someone can make us angry, and so on. In other words, Izard is trying to strike love from his list of basic emotions using arguments that apply just as well to the dispositional forms of the emotions he retains. We agree with him that “love,” when used as a synonym for attachment, does refer to a bond that causes a host of different emotions. But this does not rule out the possibility that momentary bursts, or surges, of love are among those emotions.

**Momentary Surges of Love**

Although it is true that the word “love” sometimes refers to a sentiment or emotional disposition, this does not make it different from other emotions that theorists have regarded as basic. For example, one person can hate or be angry at another for a very long time, and it is quite possible to be happy or sad (about a particular event) for an extended period. In fact, it seems reasonable to entertain the possibility that there is a dispositional form of every basic and many nonbasic emotions. The point is not, therefore, that some emotions are “emotions” and others are “dispositions,” but that there are momentary surges of every emotion as well as more long-standing, dispositional forms. In the case of love, there are surges of love—moments when we feel especially in-love or loving—as well as the more dispositional forms of love discussed by Ekman, Izard, and Frijda et al. Surges of love can exhibit rapid onset and gradations of intensity, and they can be fleeting, just like the short-lived bursts of basic emotion measured by Ekman and others in the laboratory.

Lazarus (1991) is one of the few contemporary theorists to consider both kinds of love—dispositional and state-like. He acknowledges that “love commonly means a social relationship rather than an emotional process or state, a relationship that could involve the emotion of love at some times and not at others, as well as anger, guilt, shame, and jealousy” (p. 274). He notes, however, that “when ‘love’ means an emotion, it is a process or a momentary state, a reaction that comes and goes.” Like the other basic emotions analyzed by Lazarus, love is characterized by a core relational theme (a particular relationship between self and object, or environment, that links
an evaluation or appraisal with a particular action or action tendency). This theme is described as follows: "desiring or participating in affection, usually but not necessarily reciprocated. In romantic love this consists of viewing the partner at a given moment in a highly positive way, probably but not necessarily with desire or passion, and the seeking of and yearning for sexual intimacy, which may have already been attained" (p. 276).

Shaver et al. (1987) asked 60 college-aged subjects to write accounts of moments when they themselves felt "particularly in love or loving" (the "self" condition) and 60 additional subjects to describe what typically happens when a person feels this way (the "typical" condition). These instructions emphasized surges of love rather than a disposition or sentiment. Subjects' accounts were coded to determine the most common antecedents and response components of love, which were very similar in the self and typical conditions. Among the antecedents were: finding the other attractive; feeling loved or appreciated by the other; communicating easily and openly with the other. Among the response components were: being obsessed with the other; being forgetful or distracted, daydreaming about the other; wanting to spend time (perhaps a lifetime) with the other; wanting physical closeness with the other; feeling self-confident and energetic because of the other. Some of these reactions are readily observable and so presumably could be studied empirically.

Neither Lazarus's intuitive description nor Shaver et al.'s research-based love prototype provides many details about facial expressions or specific action tendencies during surges of love, but we suspect that there are characteristic expressions and action tendencies that could be studied empirically. For example, Darwin (1872/1965) describes facial expressions associated with two forms of love, maternal and romantic. Although he says it is difficult to characterize the expression of maternal love, he notes that the maternal face is marked by "a gentle smile and tender eyes" (p. 78), whereas romantic lovers' "hearts beat quickly, their breathing is hurried, and their faces flush" (p. 79). Darwin describes the main action tendency of love as "a strong desire to touch the beloved person" (p. 213). Moreover, he believes that other species exhibit this same action tendency:

With the lower animals we see the same principle of pleasure derived from contact in association with love. Dogs and cats manifestly take pleasure in rubbing against their masters and mistresses, and in being rubbed or patted by them. Many kinds of monkeys . . . delight in fondling and being fondled by each other. (Darwin, 1872/1965, p. 213)

Morris (1971) mentions the flushing or blushing that occurs in the presence of the loved one, as well as dilation of the pupils of the eyes and an increase in tear production that causes the eyes to glisten. Hatfield and Rapson (1993) summarize a study conducted in their laboratory (Hatfield, Hsee, Costello, Schalenkamp, & Denney, in press) in which subjects were unobtrusively videotaped while reading aloud sad, angry, fearful, joyful, or loving scripts. While reading the scripts, subjects reported elevations in the corresponding emotion, and other subjects, acting as judges, were able to detect which emotion was being portrayed based solely on nonverbal cues. Hatfield et al. (in press) report that subjects reading the love scripts had softer, more tender expressions and appeared more relaxed than subjects reading the other four scripts. Similarly, Bloch, Orthous, and Santibanez (1987) studied the body language associated with joy versus love/eroticism and love/tenderness. They report that both types of love appeared distinct from joy and were characterized by relaxed facial muscles. Love/eroticism was accompanied by semi-closed eyes, whereas love/tenderness was associated with a slight smile and a slight head tilt.

Although there is currently little research on a "love face" or other nonverbal signs of love, there is good reason to believe that they exist, and that surges of love will eventually meet Ekman's "universal signal"
criteria for basic emotions. Some of these reactions will probably resemble the fairly automatic, innate expressions of other basic emotions (e.g., “Duchenne” smiles; Ekman & Friesen, 1982), whereas others may prove to be voluntary or sometimes deliberate (like polite flight-attendants’ smiles; Hochschild, 1983).

Carlson and Hatfield (1992) and Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson (1994) mention several other indicators of love: behavioral synchrony between partners, mimicking of a partner’s expressions, “catching” a partner’s feelings (by emotional contagion), certain kinds of vocal qualities (including “oohs and ahs”), and a host of behaviors observed in a very interesting classic study of children’s experiences of love (Bell, 1902, p. 330)—e.g., hugging, kissing, lifting each other, scuffling, sitting close to each other, confessing their love to each other and to other people, talking about each other when apart, seeking each other out and excluding others, grief at being separated, giving of gifts, extending courtesies withheld from others, making sacrifices for each other, and feeling jealous. This list probably includes indicators of both momentary surge and dispositional forms of love.

The importance of mutual gazing as an expression of love was demonstrated in a well-known study by Rubin (1973). Couples who reported being more intensely in love spent more time in mutual gaze than did couples less intensely in love. More recently, Kellerman, Lewis, and Laird (1989) manipulated gazed and found that mutual gazing could momentarily increase feelings of romantic love. They assigned opposite-sex strangers to one of four gaze conditions as a “warm-up” to a supposed ESP study: (1) gazing at each other’s hands, (2) having one partner gaze at the eyes of another while the other looked away, (3) having both partners look at each other’s eyes in order to count eyeblinks, and (4) gazing into each other’s eyes in an attempt to gain rapport. In the latter condition, which was most like lovers’ natural gazing, subjects reported experiencing greater interest in, attraction toward, and warmth and love for their partner.

Frijda (1986) has discussed emotions, including love, in terms of action tendencies and states of action readiness. “Tenderness can be regarded as the impulse toward tender—that is, caregiving—behavior; or else as the acute act of recognition of an object as a fit object for such behavior. Love and affection refer, among other things, to that urge toward proximity seeking in which proximity as such is the satisfaction; or else they refer to the act of stopping to note some object as fit for being-with” (p. 83). These action tendencies can presumably occur in momentary surges of love or affection; no lasting disposition is required. Lazarus (1991) also talks about caregiving tendencies as part of love: “These manifestations of affection communicate to the loved one that he or she is valued and secure in the relationship” (p. 279). He seems to be thinking of dispositional love in this case, but the same manifestations might also be present in a momentary surge of love.

Although none of the works or comments cited in this section provide a convincing, coherent case for “surge love” as an emotion that meets theorists’ criteria for basicness, and several of the authors suggest that there may be more than one form of “surge love” (e.g., maternal/tender, romantic/erotic), the evidence suggests that an empirical case for one or more basic forms of love can eventually be made. Surges of love seem identifiable, both to the individual experiencing them and to outside observers. In Table 2 we list common criteria for basicness and show how surges of love, affection, or tenderness might meet these criteria. Further research (currently underway in our laboratory) is needed to determine whether our hunches about these characteristics of love surges can be adequately supported empirically.

In the following section we consider in detail one of the most important criteria of basicness, cross-cultural and trans-historical universality. Almost no one has suggested that maternal love is exclusive to late-European societies, but this claim has often been made about romantic love. Therefore, we
Table 2. Proposed features of love “surges” that may meet accepted criteria for basic emotions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distinctive universal signals (in the face, voice, or movements)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. caregiving/maternal love: soft, subdued smile; soft, high voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. romantic love: flushing, giddy smile, raised shoulders, sideways glances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. general: glistening eyes, baby talk/motherese, eye contact, touching, increasing physical closeness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distinctive feeling state (which cannot be analyzed into separate emotions)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>warm rush accompanied by fascination and a desire to be close</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presence in other mammals (especially primates)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>affectionate postures, bodily contact (in cats, dogs, and primates), warm purrs, caresses of delight (all noted by Darwin, among others)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distinctive physiology (ANS, neural circuits, etc.)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not studied, except for Panksepp’s work on the positive side of the “panic” (attachment/separation) system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distinctive eliciting conditions or antecedent events</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perceiving another as especially desirable and/or open to special closeness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quick onset</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a sudden rush of intense feeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brief duration</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the rush comes and goes, in response to appreciating the other’s special qualities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Automatic appraisal</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>love surges arise automatically, without careful, conscious analysis of the love object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unbidden occurrence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>love surges arise naturally; they cannot be willed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: These features are based partly on the literature reviewed in the present article, partly on an examination of love surges in commercial films, and partly on informal interviews. These features are speculative but worthy of consideration.

will look specifically at the universality of this form of love.

Evidence for the Universality of Romantic Love

Should physicians come/ their drugs could not cure/ my heart, nor could the priests/ diagnose my disease./ Should they say, ‘Here/ she is,’ that would heal me./ Her name would restore me./ Should her messengers/ come and go, that/ is what would revive my heart./ More potent than herbs/ my lover is to me./ More powerful too is she/ than books of medicine./ Her arrival from outside/ is my amulet. At the sight/ of her I regain my health./ She widens her eyes at me./ and my body becomes young./ She speaks and I am strong./ I embrace her. She banishes/ the sickness from me.

In this Egyptian poem, composed more than three thousand years ago (Fowler, 1994), we encounter romantic love so intense that, except for the form of some of the language, an uninformed reader might assume that it was written by a modern teenager or excerpted from a contemporary romance novel. Although the lovers in question were clearly involved in a romantic relationship (hence experiencing dispositional love), certain components of their imagined reunion—e.g., regaining “health,” embracing passionately, widening of the eyes—are surge-like. Until recently, anthropologists and historians tended to ignore love in their accounts of other times and places or to argue that it did not exist except in recent centuries and among certain social classes. For example, Stone (1988), a highly respected historian, asserts that “if romantic love ever existed outside of Europe, it only arose among the nonwestern nation-states’ elite who had the time to cultivate an aesthetic appreciation for sub-
jective experiences" (p. 16). Averill (1980), typical of today's social-constructionist theorists of emotion, accepts de Rouge-mont's (1940/1983) historical analysis of Love in the Western World, according to which romantic love was invented in twelfth-century Europe.

Nevertheless, Jankowiak and Fischer (1992), two contemporary anthropologists interested in the universality of romantic love, describe how during the Sung Dynasty in China (928–1233 C.E.) the most popular tale among both the literary and nonliterate population was that of the Jade Goddess:

It is a tale about Chang Po who falls in love with a woman who is already engaged. When he feels that "the greatest desire of his was beyond him" (Lin, 1961, p. 75), he loses interest in work and lapses into a prolonged despair, a love-despair that closely resembles that which was being discussed in the Romance poems of Europe at the same time. Finally, he confronts the girl about his love and discovers that she has the same feelings. They elope. After a while, however, suffering from poverty and isolation, they decide to return home. On the night they are to leave, Chang Po draws the girl into his arms and says "since heaven and earth were created you were made for me and I will not let you go." (p. 153)

On the basis of a thorough examination of anthropological data from 166 non-Westernized societies (data from the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample [Murdock & White, 1969] supplemented by ethnographies of particular societies and analyses of folklore), Jankowiak and Fischer (1992) found ample evidence of romantic love, even though most anthropologists had not explicitly focused on it. They coded cultures as "love present" if they met at least one of five criteria: (1) ethnographers affirmed that romantic love was present ("the presence of romantic love ... was coded only when the ethnographer made a clear distinction between lust and love, and then noted the presence of love"); (2) ethnographic records indicated at least one case of elopement due to affection rather than other, or unstated, reasons; (3) native accounts affirmed the existence of passionate love; (4) native accounts mentioned romantic anguish and longing (including lovesickness); and (5) there were love songs or folk stories depicting romantic involvement. Jankowiak and Fischer (1992) concluded as follows: "The fact that we are able to document the occurrence of romantic love in 88.5 percent of the sampled cultures [147 out of 166] stands in direct contradiction to the popular idea that romantic love is essentially limited to or the product of Western culture. Moreover, it suggests that romantic love constitutes a human universal, or at least a near-universal" (p. 154).

Of the 19 love-absent cultures, in only one case did an ethnographer explicitly claim that romantic love did not exist. In the other 18, ethnographers noted that sexual affairs occurred but did not remark on the motives or feelings involved (therefore, according to Jankowiak and Fischer's criteria, these affairs could not be considered examples of romantic love). Thus, the figure of 88.5% may well be an underestimate of the prevalence of romantic love in non-Westernized societies.

To show the extent to which contemporary experiences of romantic love can be recognized in ancient writings, we have reproduced in Table 3 excerpts from several Egyptian poems written around the same time as the one quoted at the beginning of this section. (Similar descriptions can be found in other ancient sources such as the Mahabharata of India, the Hebrew "Song of Solomon," Sappho's poetry [see the 1958 translation in References], and early Chinese operas and poems [e.g., Chinese Love Lyrics, 1964; "Liang Shanbo and Zhu Ying-tai," a 1,500-year-old folk tale].) The full range of such sources awaits psychological analysis, but we believe it is likely that they will support the claim of universality.

Wu and Shaver (1993; also Wu, 1992) compared conceptions of love in the United States with those in the People's Republic of China, two societies with very different linguistic and cultural traditions. Wu and Shaver (using a procedure developed by Fehr, 1988; see also Fehr & Russell,
Table 3. Thematic excerpts from 3,000-year-old Egyptian love poetry (anthologized by Fowler, 1994)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical signs</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The sight of you makes bright/my eyes. (p. 25)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My heart quickly flits/ away when I remember/ your love. . . [It] has leapt from its proper place./ . . Don’t let people say,/ “The girl collapsed because/ she was so much in love.” (p. 61)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soaring feelings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am going to the Garden/ of Love. . . I am/a noblewoman. I am/ Queen of the Two Lands/ whenever I am with you. (p. 11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting to be physically close</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would that I were/, if only for a month/, the launderer of/ my beloved’s linen cloth!/ I’d gather strength/ from just the grasp/ of the clothes that touch/ my beloved’s body. . . I’d rub then my body/ with the clothes/ that she’d cast off/. . . (p. 40)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The scent of your nose/ alone restores my heart. (p. 19) (This refers to the then-popular practice of rubbing noses and sniffing the lover’s face.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being forgetful, distracted, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your love/ ensnares me. I can’t let it go. . . . I set no traps today/, ensnared as I was by love. (p. 17)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love-sickness and the distress of separation or rejection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will lie down within/ and feign to be ill, and then/ my neighbors will come to see. My beloved will enter with them. She’ll put the physicians to shame/ for she will understand/ that I am sick for love. (p. 8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of my love for him/ my heart cannot be silent. It sends a messenger to me . . . to tell me how my lover/ has done me wrong. In short/ he’s found another who gazes/ at his face. Well, what do I care that another/ with cruel and cunning heart/ makes me a stranger now. (p. 23).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1991) asked American and Chinese subjects to list features of love. Among the top 20 features in both countries were: caring, happiness, trust, sharing, commitment, honesty/sincerity, understanding, excitement, warmth, and giving. Among the spontaneously mentioned hedonically negative aspects of love in both countries were: pain, sadness, loneliness, and sacrifice. When subjects were asked to rate the centrality of each of the freely listed features, the following were among the top 20 in both cultures: understanding, sincerity, honesty, trust, communication, respect, commitment, closeness, giving, support, affinity/relationship, and happiness. Chinese subjects spontaneously listed more negative features of love than did American subjects, probably because love has been less free and more obstructed there (by the custom of arranged marriage, by unbridgeable geographical and class separations). However, when both groups were explicitly asked about negative features, they produced very similar lists, including: pain, jealousy, unrequited love, being tied down, separation, loss, betrayal/desertion, time consumption, and conflict. (The same kind of similarity was evident when subjects in both countries were asked to list positive features of love.) Although subjects intermingled dispositional and “surge” conceptions of love in both cultures, it seems likely that the dispositional components give rise to momentary bursts or surges—e.g., surges of caring, excitement, and warmth.

When subjects in the United States and China were asked to list kinds of love, the following types appeared among the top examples in both countries: love between parent and child (also listed as motherly, fatherly, parental, and love for parents); family love (including sibling love); romantic love (including true love, everlasting love, and deep, unforgettable love); marital love (including committed love and love between spouses); friendship; and love of life. These are mainly dispositional forms of love (tied to particular attachment relationships), which again we would argue encom-
pass or give rise to short-term surges of feeling.

**Forms of Love Related to Attachment, Caregiving, and Sex**

In both Chinese and American cultures, and in many other cultures as well, dispositional love is associated with a mixture of positive and negative feelings; moreover, the same general terms are used to name both parent–child and adult romantic love. Why is this? In line with earlier treatments of this issue (e.g., Izard, 1991; Shaver & Hazan, 1993; Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988), we believe that love-related emotions are manifestations of three underlying motivational systems, one of which Bowlby (1969, 1979) called the attachment-behavioral system. Bowlby drew connections between the attachment system and the experience of love in the following passage:

Many of the most intense emotions arise during the formation, the maintenance, the disruption, and the renewal of attachment relationships. The formation of a bond is described as falling in love, maintaining a bond as loving someone. Similarly, threat of loss arouses anxiety and actual loss gives rise to sorrow; whilst each of these situations is likely to arouse anger. The unchallenged maintenance of a bond is experienced as a source of security and the renewal of a bond is experienced as a source of joy. . . . [Hence] the psychology and psychopathology of emotion is found to be in large part the psychology and psychopathology of affectional bonds. (1979, p. 69)

Notice that in this account falling in love and loving someone are no more “plots” than are sorrow and anger; all of these emotions stem from appraisals of the state of attachment relationships. One of the emotions evoked by these relationships is the one we have called “surge love.” Lazarus (1991) writes that “in a love relationship one assumes that feelings of love will recur at least occasionally and perhaps often. . . . [Yet] some of the time—and in spite of the tendency of poets to idealize it—there will be hope, passion, anger, indifference, boredom, guilt, [or] distress . . . depending on moment to moment and day to day patterns of interaction with the partner” (pp. 274–275).

Figure 1 summarizes the dynamics of the attachment-behavioral system as it functions both in infant–caregiver relationships and in adult romantic relationships. The question asked in the diamond-shaped box is an example of what most contemporary emotion theorists call appraisals of a situation in relation to important needs or goals. The circles represent characteristic

![Figure 1. A flowchart model of the attachment behavioral system.](image-url)
Love as a basic emotion

emotions experienced as a consequence of particular appraisals, and the boxes represent observable behaviors indicative of particular emotions. The emotion that we call surge love is, in one of its guises, a natural consequence of appreciating, at a particular moment, that an attachment figure is available, responsive, and caring.

The roots of surge love go well beyond attachment, at least when attachment is conceptualized, following Bowlby, as characteristic of the dependent, weaker member of an affectionally bonded dyad. Hazan and Shaver (1987, 1994; Shaver et al., 1988), following a brief suggestion by Ainsworth (1982), have argued that, in order to handle all of the important aspects of adult romantic love, one needs to think of it as a joint function, or integration, of three of the behavioral systems discussed by Bowlby: attachment, caregiving, and sex. The display below shows how love might be experienced when evoked in relation to each of these behavioral systems. (The experience of being “in love” often involves a mixture of all three.) In terms of this analysis, surges of love might include slightly different facial expressions, body language, and behavioral tendencies, depending on whether they are grounded primarily in motives related to attachment, caregiving, or sexual attraction. Such differences were evident in the literature we reviewed earlier, where some authors (including Darwin) distinguished between maternal and romantic love. What all love surges have in common, however, is that they move the person toward proximity, touch, and openness to intimacy. These common behavioral tendencies, along with presumed similarities or family resemblances in subjective experiences, cause people in many different cultures to use the same term, “love,” for all such instances. Morris (1971) included similar ideas in his discussion of the developmental origins of some of the components of romantic love and its sexual expression:

In terms of the behavior involved, falling in love looks very much like a return to infancy. In tracing the way in which the primary embrace of our earliest years gradually becomes restricted as we mature, we watch the decline and fall of close body intimacy. Now, as we observe the young lovers, we see the whole process put into reverse. The first actions in the sexual sequence are virtually identical with those of any other kind of adult social interaction. Then, little by little, the hands of the behavioural clock start to turn backwards. The formal handshake and small-talk of the first introduction grow back into the protective hand-holding of childhood. The young lovers now walk hand in hand, as each once did with his or her parent. As their bodies come closer together with increasing trust, we soon witness the welcome return of the intimate frontal embrace, with the two heads touching and kissing. As the relationship deepens, we travel still further back, to the earlier days of gentle caresses. The hands once again fondle the face, the hair and the body of the loved one. At last, the lovers are naked again and, for the first

Three of Bowlby’s “behavioral systems” play a role in romantic love: attachment, caregiving, and sex. Thus, the statement “I love you” can mean any or all of the following:

1. “I am emotionally dependent on you for happiness, safety, and security; I feel anxious and lonely when you’re gone, relieved and stronger when you’re near. I want to be comforted, supported emotionally, and taken care of by you. Part of my identity is based on my attachment to you.” (Love as Attachment.)

2. “I get great pleasure from supporting, caring for, and taking care of you; from facilitating your progress, health, growth, and happiness. Part of my identity is based on caring for you, and if you were to disappear I would feel sad, empty, less worthwhile, and perhaps guilty.” (Love as Caregiving.)

3. “I am sexually attracted to you and can’t get you out of my mind. You excite me, ‘turn me on,’ make me feel alive, complete my sense of wholeness. I want to see you, devour you, touch you, merge with you, lose myself in you, ‘get off’ on you.” (Love as Sexual Attraction.)

Figure 2. Love as a manifestation of three behavioral systems.
time since they were tiny babies, the most private parts of their bodies experience the intimate touch of another’s hands. And, as their movements travel backward in time, so do their voices, the words spoken becoming less important than the soft tonal quality with which they are delivered. Frequently even the phrases used become infantile, as a new kind of “baby talk” develops. A wave of shared security envelops the young couple and, as in babyhood, the hurly-burly of the outside world has little meaning. (pp. 98–99)

Summary and Conclusion

We believe that love deserves more attention than it has received so far from contemporary emotion theorists. Love is not included in many “official” lists of basic emotions, yet it is high on the list of everyday emotion concepts. Part of the confusion about love stems from the fact that it comes in both momentary surges and in longer-lasting relational and dispositional forms. The surges deserve increased attention, because they may well qualify as one or more basic emotions on all of Ekman’s and Izard’s grounds. To date, no one has looked closely enough to find out. Love in the dispositional or relational sense is partly, as Bowlby pointed out, another name for attachment. Considered in light of attachment theory, love is complex—as many theorists have noted when dropping it from their lists of basic emotions. In the ordinary course of its operations, the attachment-behavioral system generates a host of emotions (e.g., surges of love, separation anxiety, anger, jealousy, loneliness, and grief). Viewed from this perspective, which is similar to that of Izard (1991), love appears to be more than a single emotion. Yet there is more to adult romantic love than attachment, because this form of love involves three of the behavioral systems analyzed by Bowlby: attachment, caregiving, and sex. When surges of love are caused by the appraisal of a situation in relation to one of these motivational systems, the behavioral and emotional tendencies toward proximity-seeking have a particular subjective cast. Nevertheless, the tendencies are similar enough, when people experience or witness them, to cause folk wisdom to lump them all together as examples of “love.”

Love is not unusual, in our opinion, by virtue of being a plot, because anger, sadness, and fear often involve plots as well—sometimes even plots related to attachment. Love is unusual, to the extent that it is unusual, because it is so integrally wrapped up with the attachment, caregiving, and sexual systems—biological systems as ancient as emotion itself. If the neurological and ethological basis of love is ever going to be fathomed, attachment will have to be addressed in the process.

One final comment. Even if one or more forms of “surge love” ultimately prove to be poor candidates for scientific basicness, it would be a mistake, in our opinion, to ignore the central roles played by attachment, caregiving, and sex in people’s emotional lives. A psychology of emotion that says nothing at all about parental love, romantic love, the love of a child for its primary caregiver, and affection between siblings and friends has closed itself off from some of the most important human emotional experiences. The prototypicality of love in the everyday conception of emotion may or may not indicate that love should be considered a basic emotion, but it clearly indicates that love is an important part of the emotional landscape—a part that psychological theorists ignore at their, and their theories’, peril.

References


