

Review of the book *Love Sense: The revolutionary new science of romantic relationships* by S.M. Johnson.

Reviewed by Lorrie Brubacher, M.Ed., LMFT and Daniel Perlman, Ph.D.

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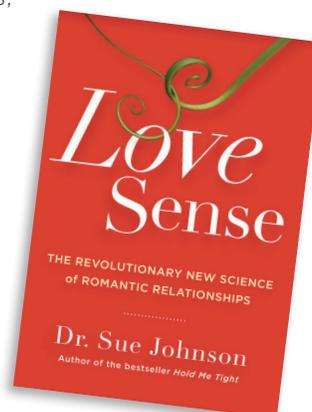
Love Sense: The revolutionary new science of romantic relationships.

Little, Brown and Company.
(Hardcover, 352 pages), \$27.00.

Dr. Sue Johnson begins *Love Sense* with an acknowledgement that “a tsunami of loneliness, anxiety and depression is sweeping through Western societies.” As an answer to this negative trend, Johnson draws on findings in the natural and social sciences to outline a revolutionary perspective on romantic love, one that is optimistic and practical for both clinicians and the general public. Johnson offers an innovative answer to the question, “What is love?” that responds to the widespread doubts about the viability of relationships in general and

skepticism, in particular, about whether we are wired for

monogamy. Her answer, that love is an attachment bond, is informed by the new science, which views love as an ordered and wise recipe for survival. She outlines a practical approach to building relationship bonds and repairing broken relationships that is relevant to couple and family psychologists. She furthermore elaborates on how developmental and



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social psychology is providing a platform of research to support intervention. From the outset, she summarizes some of the more provocative scientific findings, which are later expanded on, as follows:

“The first and foremost instinct of humans is neither sex nor aggression”(p. 19). It is to connect.

“Adult romantic love is an attachment bond, just like the one between mother and child” (p. 20).

Sexuality meshes with and is shaped by attachment imperatives. Emotional dependency has been pathologized, but effective dependence is our greatest source of strength (p. 21).

“Being the ‘best you can be’ is really only possible when you are deeply connected to another. Splendid isolation is for planets, not people” (p. 23).

“[We] are designed to be empathetic, rather than selfish. Our innate tendency is to feel with and for others” (p. 24).

Interwoven with the scientific findings are stories and transcripts of couples in therapy, nuggets from popular songs, movies and musicals, quotations of classic poetry and Shakespearian plays, engaging the reader in this paradigmatic shift of defining love as an attachment bond. Each chapter ends with a pithy summation of the clinical relevance of the reported science, followed by exercises for the reader to make personal connections with the scientific claims.

PART ONE: The Relationship Revolution begins with the revolutionary new perspective on relationships. Chapter One outlines the essence of love as an attachment bond. Chapter Two, gives a very readable and informed overview of the development of attachment theory from John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth’s studies on infants and mothers – to the many studies on adult attachment. She argues that all the research is telling the same story: that grown-up love involves the same compelling longing for closeness and need for safe haven connection that lessens fear and stress; the same emotional turmoil at the threat of loss and separation; and, the same basic strategies for linking with others or cutting them off, as the bonds between mother and child. This simple claim that a loss of secure connection and emotional responsiveness is what can make or break our adult love relationships sets the foundation for the entire book.

PART TWO: The New Science of Love is comprised of three chapters, each exploring and referencing scientific studies on (1) emotion (strong emotion as the essence of love, and how attachment styles shapes affect regulation) (2) the brain (the physiology and neurochemistry of love and how love shapes the brain); and (3) the body (emotional connection and attachment style shape the expression of sexuality).

As a unit these three chapters beautifully elucidate the interconnectivity of emotion, brain and body in the process of love, as affirmed in her most recent scientific study, appearing in the journal *The Public Library of Science* in November 2013. This article, entitled, “Soothing the threatened brain: Leveraging contact comfort with Emotionally Focused Therapy,” dramatically illustrates that

Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) not only increases relationship satisfaction, but is also associated with a shift from distress and insecurity to more secure bonding. The brain scan part of the study shows that a secure bond impacts the way brains respond to threat.

PART THREE: Love in Action begins with a review of “Love Across Time” – the process of forming and renewing bonds across the developmental stages of relationships and life transitions. The chapter “Unraveling Bonds” looks at how and why relationships fail, outlining both a process of “slow erosion” and the “sudden snap” where a pivotal moment shatters the relationship bond. The “Renewing Bonds” chapter most specifically delineates the steps of EFT, referencing outcome studies that validate its effectiveness. Johnson elucidates with clinical examples the two-step process of helping couples to first, recognize and contain the circular patterns that keep them emotionally off balance and in distress, and second, to reshape the relationship bond with specific moments of emotional engagement and vulnerability, sending clear messages that pull for attuned and compassionate bonding responses.

PART FOUR: The New Science Applied begins with “A Love Story” – a case illustration of a couple moving from breakup to bonding with EFT, following the wife’s affair. This process is then extended in the final chapter, “Love in the 21st Century” to sculpting a new civilization, based on our universal need to belong and to be held in loving connection. This is more than utopian thinking. Scientific studies are cited, which show that a sense of secure attachment can reduce aggression and promote tolerance between groups of people with hostile differences.

Love Sense is a compelling read, and a clinically relevant resource for couple and family psychologists to enhance their practice. It is also an excellent book to recommend to clients and is sure to have a positive impact on many lives. Johnson provides numerous scientific references that point to love as an attachment bond which innately increases confidence, resilience, physical and emotional health, and has the capacity to increase compassion and overcome enmity between diverse social and international groups, and ultimately to foster an empathic civilization.



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