Book Review

A General Theory of Love

Reviewed by Suzan McVicker, M.A.[1]

A General Theory of Love is to Self Leadership as crimson is to valentines. A red-hot missive from the hearts of three psychiatrists, the book took sixteen years to write. Lewis, Amini, and Lannon cast science into a personally engaging, poetic letter to the reader. Their quiver of academic arrows loosed from several fields of brain research supports the therapeutic process described by clients working with therapists trained in the Internal Family Systems (IFS) model. Love is no less, the authors believe, than the "life force of the mind". The templates for relationships spanning the range of expressions of love are absorbed into human physiology. Identity is determined and then stored in the mind. *A General Theory of Love* focuses a picture of the crucial nature of love and its centrality in a complex interweave of multilevel systems of body, mind, and spirit.

Throughout history descriptions of love have flourished only in the province of the arts. Religion and spiritual traditions taught aspects of love as the preferred pathway. Empirical research emerged, however, only in the last decade as science finally produced enough data to point straight to love's critical role in brain function. Lewis, Amini, and Lannon's discussion of "love's three neural faces—limbic resonance, regulation, and revision—constitute psychotherapy's core and the adult mind's capacity for growth" portrays IFS therapy. The trio of psychiatrists underscores how therapy must create enough closeness and safety through relatedness to balance and stabilize. "When a limbic connection has established a neural pattern, it takes a limbic connection to revise it."

Revision of burdens absorbed by parts of the self is one aim of IFS therapy. Balance and regulation within the inner systems of the self and parts is then possible. Direct experience transforming parts' burdens informs the IFS practitioner of the power of love. And the power of love denied or neglected. The emotional principles governing parts experiencing acceptance and ultimately love appear to be inexorably tied to neural development. Science becomes clarifying, indeed unburdening when the restorative medicine of connectedness through compassionate witness is explained in terms of reversing attachment disorder by changing the messages of neurons. The application of scientific research in examining the inner world paralleling the external world is affirming and hope-giving.

Sagacious reasoning from of the neo-cortex region of the brain, the arts over the ages, and the cutting edge of science cannot yet lend us full understanding of love. Lewis, Amini, and Lannon hit their mark by collecting evidence for the need of a paradigm shift in human relationships. From their book's bulls-eye the next archers can pull the beautifully crafted arrows of these pioneering psychiatrists. New points can be sharpened with research arising from the IFS model. Intrapsychic relationships, intimacy, and social relatedness can be illuminated through brain studies that speak the model's approachable language. Revising relationships among the self and parts can be demonstrated to revise physiology. Love will become equally at home in scholarly journals as it has been in valentines.

Reference

Lewis, T., Amini, F. & Lannon, R. (2001). *A general theory of love. New York:* Vintage Books

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