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A Tribute to Ellen Berscheid, a Prominent Researcher in the Social Psychology of Love and Relationship

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With profound sadness, the *Institute of Love Studies* shares news that Ellen Berscheid, an American social psychologist and one of the pioneering figures in the studies of love and interpersonal relationships, passed away on May 22, 2025.

Ellen S. Berscheid (1936-2025), a distinguished figure in social psychology, significantly influenced our understanding of interpersonal attraction, love, and close relationships. Her innovative research, in collaboration with her prominent colleague Elaine Hatfield (formerly Walster), substantially contributed to relationship science and established it as a legitimate scientific field of research.

A Pioneer in the Social Psychology of Love

Born in 1936, Ellen Berscheid spent her early years of life and had her education in Wisconsin, Nevada, and back in Wisconsin. Then, she studied social psychology at the University of Minnesota, working with

Elliot Aronson, where, in 1965, she earned her Ph.D. in Social Psychology.

Berscheid started her teaching and academic career at the University of Minnesota, where she met Elaine (Walster) Hatfield, who convinced her to join her in researching social attraction and equity. Their early research focused on interpersonal attraction.

Since that time, Ellen Berscheid has worked at the University of Minnesota, where she had a distinguished academic career that spanned decades. Her main research interests have been in the field of interpersonal relationships. She studied the psychology of close relationships, why and how people feel interpersonal attraction and fall in love. She explored the various factors that draw individuals together, including physical attractiveness, propinquity, and similarity.

In the early years of her academic career, many people viewed the studies of love and intimate relationships as too subjective, even trivial, for serious academic inquiry. Ellen Berscheid, along with her longtime collaborator Elaine Hatfield, had the intellectual courage to confront this prejudice. They carried out groundbreaking studies on the psychology of love, passion, and attraction. In their early 1970s, they investigated the concepts of passionate and companionate love that became a basis for decades of further study of love.

Ellen Berscheid's Great Contributions to the Psychology of Love and Close Relationships

The book *Interpersonal Attraction*, which Elaine (Walster) Hatfield and Ellen Berscheid published in 1969, with the second edition following in 1978, was among the most prominent early contributions to the studies of interpersonal attraction and love. The other prominent publications

on the topic were her articles and chapters in the edited volumes, such as *Interpersonal Attraction* ([Berscheid, 1985](#)), *A Little Bit About Love* (Berscheid & Walster, 1974), and *Love in the Fourth Dimension* ([Berscheid, 2010](#)).

Ellen Berscheid also delved deeply into the nature of close relationships, exploring their development, maintenance, and dissolution. She investigated the evolving emotional landscape of love within long-term partnerships, thoroughly exploring how people experience and express different forms of love and what impact they have on relationship satisfaction and longevity.

She emphasized interpersonal interdependence in close relationships, arguing that partners are profoundly intertwined, with each partner's actions and outcomes significantly affecting the other. This perspective highlighted the reciprocal nature of relational processes (e.g., [Berscheid & Regan, 2005](#); [Berscheid & Reis, 1998](#)).

The Great Legacy of Ellen Berscheid's Love Research

Ellen Berscheid was prominent in advancing the scientific rigor of relationship research. She applied experimental methods to the study of interpersonal processes, thus elevating the field of love research beyond philosophical speculations, observations, literary studies, and art studies. One of her last contributions to the future of love research was her suggested framework for pursuing the study of love as evolving throughout long-term periods of individual life ([Berscheid, 2010](#)).

I believe that the legacy of Ellen Berscheid, an outstanding researcher in the psychology of love, interpersonal attraction, and our interdependence in interpersonal relationships, is immense. It has great

scientific potential—both conceptually and methodologically—for current and future scholars of love ([Karandashev, 2022, 2024](#)).

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