

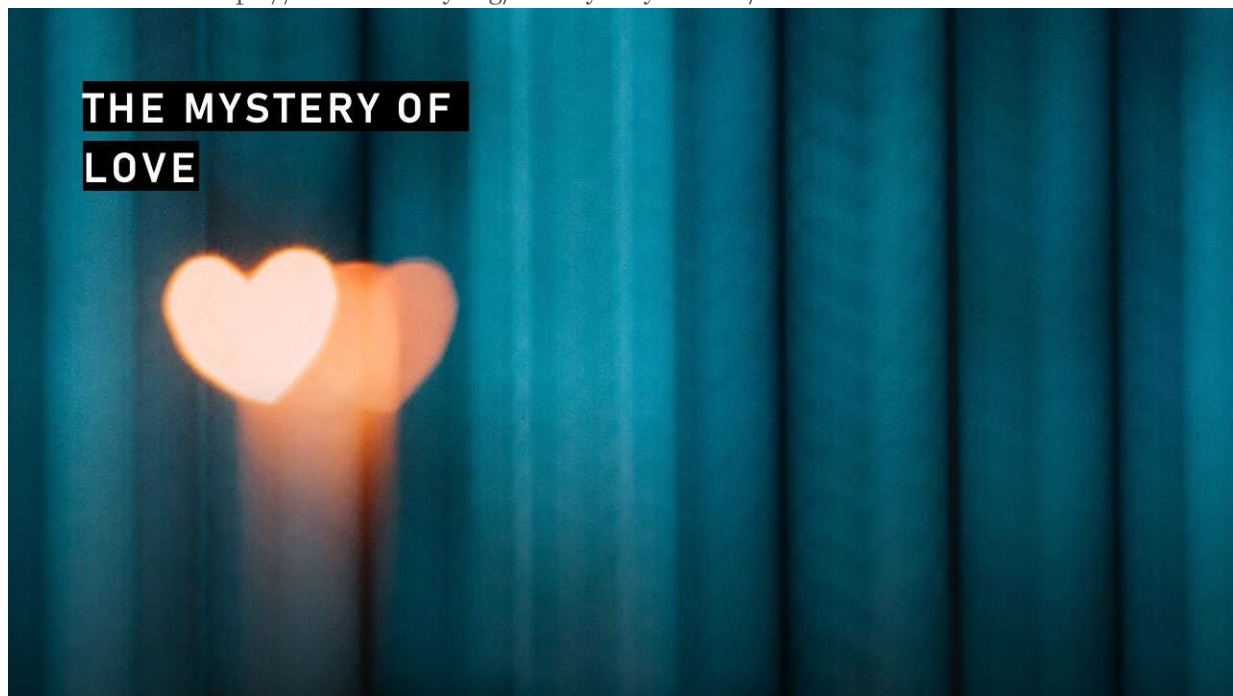
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The Mystery of Love: Conceptual Frameworks, Cultural Beliefs, and Scientific Inquiries

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Is romantic love a psychological mystery, or can science explain its sudden, irrational surge? This article examines the psychological, cultural, and historical constructs of “love’s magic” and “chemistry”—exploring how subconscious cognitive processing and cultural models shape our perception of romantic attraction as an overwhelming, involuntary force.

Introduction: The Perennial Enigma of Erotic and Romantic Attraction

The causes of love are unknown. Why may a man or woman not love someone who is good and nice in many respects? Why does a person sometimes fall in love with bad boys or girls?

Love can strike at any moment and in any place, rendering a lover a powerless victim who acts irrationally and loses control over his or her actions and motives. Men and women do not intentionally choose with whom they fall in love. It is assumed that it is impossible to purposefully fall in love with someone.

Romantic love has been widely depicted across centuries as mystery, magic, and the mysterious chemistry between individuals. Many people believe that the secrets of romantic love are beyond our comprehension, rationality, and reasoning. Their beliefs in love admit irrationality of some sort. While the less educated people of traditional cultures referred to the “magic of love,” modern educated people call this “love’s chemistry.” The latter undoubtedly sounds more scientific, yet it still admits to love’s magic. Anyway, both concepts accept romantic love’s inexplicable irrationality. The scientific nature of love chemistry continues to elude our intellectual comprehension (Karandashev, 2017, 2019).

Popular consciousness and artistic traditions consistently harbor the belief that the core mechanisms of romantic affection operate beyond the boundaries of human rationality, empirical logic, and conscious calculation. To accept love, in the popular mind, is to admit a fundamental form of irrationality—an emotional force that defies straightforward cause-and-effect explanations. This article explores the psychological, cultural, and conceptual dimensions of love’s perceived irrationality. By synthesizing cross-cultural ethnographic accounts, psychological theories, and historical perspectives, it examines why humans consistently perceive romantic attraction as an overwhelming external force, how cultural constructs formalize this mystery, and how scientific inquiry seeks to understand the boundary between cognitive rationality and emotional surrender.

Unknown Causes and the Involuntary Nature of Love

The causes of love are unknown. Why may a man or woman not love someone who is good and nice in many respects? Why does a person sometimes fall in love with bad boys or girls? Love can strike at any moment and in any place, rendering a lover a powerless victim who acts irrationally and loses control over his or her actions and motives. Men and women do not intentionally choose with whom they fall in love.

It is assumed that it is impossible to purposefully fall in love with someone. In fact, a person “falls in love not by design and conscious choice but according to some accident of fate over which the victim has no control” (Greenfield, 1965, p. 363).

Consequently, romantic love is felt as an uncontrollable emotion, driven by an external power that overwhelms one’s life. Specifically, unlike strategic socio-economic alliances or utilitarian partnerships, genuine romantic love is experienced as an involuntary psychological phenomenon. As a result, in such states, individuals frequently experience a partial suspension of executive cognitive control, acting directly against their personal economic, social, or long-term interest.

PERCEIVED DIMENSIONS OF LOVE’S

MYSTERY

**1. INVOLUNTARINESS &
LACK OF AGENCY**

**2. TRANSCENDENT &
MYSTICAL QUALITY**

- Uncontrollable emotional onset (“falling” in love)
- Indifference toward ideal partners vs. sudden attraction

- Liberation from routine, cold rationality (Weber, 1946)
- Involuntary cognitive intrusion & limerence (Tennov, 1979)

3. METAPHORICAL & FOLK CULTURAL CONSTRUCTS

- Supernatural interventions (Cupid’s arrows, spells)
- Modern pseudoscientific metaphors (“instant chemistry”)

4. CROSS-CULTURAL VARIABILITY & UNIVERSALITY

- Universal recognition of love’s unaccountability
- Cultural variation in cognitive endorsement (e.g., France)

Psychologically, this experience corresponds closely to Dorothy Tennov’s (1979) construct of *limerence*—an involuntary, highly intrusive affective state characterized by obsessive thinking, acute emotional dependence, and an intense fear of rejection. Tennov noted that individuals in limerent states describe their condition as an “aching of the heart” and an “infection of the brain.” The subjective agency of the lover is temporarily suspended; love is conceptualized not as a deliberate decision, but as an affective condition driven by an external, overpowering force. Consequently, the idea of an intentional fall in love by deliberate choice remains contradictory to the subjective phenomenology of romantic attraction across most human cultures.

The Irrationality and Mystery of Erotic Love

As in any other mystical experience, erotic romantic love appears as an insight that is incomprehensible and unreachable for the rational mind. To some people, the mystery of romantic love is comparable to the magic of religious experience. In both cases, rationality is not suitable to grasp them. In both cases, the rationale is not applicable to their comprehension.

Lovers, like the devoted believers, are free from “the cold skeleton hands of rational orders, just as completely as from the banality of everyday routine” (Weber, 1958, p. 347). The emotional experience of love for them resembles magical transcendence. According to anecdotal love stories and myths, people don’t truly understand why they love one person but not another. They rarely choose a partner and rarely fall in love for rational reasons. The idea of an intentional fall in love by choice sounds unlikely. Most people do not believe that they can fall in love with someone when they wish.

Weber’s Structural Tension: Rational Order vs. Erotic Transcendence

Erotic & Romantic Surge

(Free, Transcendent, Acute)



Traditional Bureaucracy

(Routine, Formal, Standardized)

Rational Calculation

(Pragmatic, Cost-Benefit)

In Weberian terms, romantic love operates as a secular form of charismatic disruption. Just as religious mysticism liberates the believer from formalistic dogma, romantic affection liberates the individual from utilitarian cost-benefit analysis. Empirical studies in relationship science reinforce this distinction: individuals rarely select romantic partners based purely on an explicit, linear tallying of desirable traits (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008). Instead, human partner selection involves complex, non-linear evaluations where implicit neurobiological signals and subjective affective appraisals override conscious, articulated preferences.

Mystical Experience of Love: Spells, Charms, and Aphrodisiacs

Across time, the mysterious, wonderful, and magical feelings associated with love have fascinated people. These long-held beliefs in the mystery of love were due to people's inability to rationally explain why people suddenly fall in love. Cupid's arrows fired from his bow caused the person struck to fall in love.

Love magic and love spells have been practiced for hundreds of years. The stories of success have been mostly anecdotal. Love magic presumably attracts the love of the beloved. It's frequently used by a woman to induce a certain man to love her or by a man to induce a specific woman to love him. It was a promising cure in the case of unrequited love. Magical love spells are supposed to be helpful in such cases.

HISTORICAL FOLK INTERVENTIONS FOR LOVE

BOTANICAL APHRODISIACS

- Mandrake Root
(*Mandragora officinarum*) & Herbal Infusions

CELESTIAL & MYTHIC AGENCY

- Cupid's Arrows, Fate, Divine Intercession

RITUALISTIC & FOLK PRACTICES

- Romani Charms, Talismans, Candle Control, Binding Spells

Certain herbs, like the mandrake (*Mandragora officinarum*), were supposed to have aphrodisiac or magical properties that were particularly beneficial in cases of love. All in the name of love, amulets, charms, and talismans have been created, candles lit and ritualistically controlled, and ceremonies performed. The Gypsies (Romani) use a variety of love charms and practices. They include using magic to draw in someone you want, push away someone you don't want, and make connections stronger. Because human societies historically lacked access to contemporary neurobiology, they constructed these elaborate folk systems to manipulate an emotional state that felt otherwise beyond conscious human control.

The Mystery of Love Across Cultures

The idea of the irrationality of love seems to be cross-culturally universal. The concepts of God's blessing, miracle, destiny, fate, and love chemistry all

describe that romantic love is beyond our rational understanding. Some cultures and some people believe in the irrationality of love more than others. For example, French people tend to more readily believe in the irrational nature of love than Americans (Karandashev, 2017, 2019). ([Karandashev, 2017, 2019](#)).

CROSS-CULTURAL BELIEF SPECTRUM ON LOVE

HIGH IRRATIONALITY / ROMANTICISM ENDORSEMENT

(e.g., France, Western Individualist Models)

- Prioritizes passion, inexplicable chemistry, and destiny.
- Rejects pragmatic or institutional partner selection.

BALANCED / RATIONAL-PRACTICAL INTEGRATION

(e.g., Collectivist Traditions, Arranged/Assisted Marriages)

- Recognizes emotional surge, but subordinates it to family, character, social compatibility, and shared commitment.

Cross-cultural psychological research demonstrates that cultural models shape how emotional experiences are interpreted and expressed (Karandashev, 2019):

- **Individualistic Romanticism:** Western societies—particularly influenced by Romantic literature and individualist values—heavily emphasize the unaccountable, passionate model of love. Studies

comparing French and American romantic attitudes indicate that French cultural discourse often places particularly high stock in the irreducible, irrational, and poetic nature of love, viewing attempts to rationalize or codify attraction with skepticism (Karandashev, 2017).

- **Collectivist and Practical Models:** In many traditional and Eastern societies, while the sudden emotional spark of love is acknowledged in folklore and song, cultural institutions place higher emphasis on compassionate, affectionate, and rational dimensions of partnership. Concepts of familial suitability, social alignment, and gradual emotional growth (*gancheng* in Chinese contexts) frame romantic affection as something that can cultivate rationally over time within structural commitment, rather than relying exclusively on an explosive initial mystery (Karandashev, 2017, 2019).

Love at first sight is one of the most mysterious phenomena. People across many cultures experience it in their lives and relationships.

Scientists are attempting to explain love at first sight.

Bridging Mystery and Empirical Science

How does contemporary relationship science address a phenomenon whose defining characteristic is its subjective mystery? Modern psychological and neurobiological research does not seek to dismantle the subjective beauty of romantic attraction, but rather to map the implicit biological mechanisms that produce the sensation of unaccountable chemistry.

Empirical studies demonstrate that what lay observers experience as “mysterious chemistry” is often the rapid synthesis of multiple subconscious evaluation channels:

- **Neurochemical Cascades:** The sudden onset of intense attraction is mediated by localized surges of dopamine, norepinephrine, and central phenethylamine, coupled with temporary decreases in central serotonin levels, creating a neurobiological state strikingly similar to obsessive-focused attention (Fisher et al., 2005; Marazziti et al., 1999).
- **Implicit Processing & Micro-Behaviors:** Visual gaze tracking, facial symmetry evaluation, micro-expressions, and major histocompatibility complex (MHC) olfactory cues operate within milliseconds, transmitting complex social and biological information to the brain before conscious rational awareness can articulate a decision (Karandashev, 2017).

Thus, science reveals that the “mystery” of love is not the absence of causality, but rather the speed and complexity of subconscious affective cognitive processing. The subjective feeling of an uncontrollable, magical spark occurs precisely because human cognitive architecture processes social and biological compatibility long before it formulates a conscious, verbal rationale.

Conclusion: The Enduring Role of Mystery in Relationship Science

The mystery of romantic love represents a fundamental intersection between human neurobiology, subjective phenomenology, and cultural narrative. Whether conceptualized through ancient myths of Cupid, folk rituals of love magic, European philosophical critiques of rationalism, or contemporary notions of biochemical chemistry, humans consistently recognize that romantic affection cannot be reduced to simple, conscious utilitarian planning.

Recognizing the irrational and transcendent dimensions of love does not diminish the value of scientific inquiry. Rather, it highlights the necessity of an

interdisciplinary relationship science—one that respects the subjective depth of human emotional experience while elucidating the cultural and psychological structures that give it meaning. As relationship scholarship advances, the study of love’s mystery remains a cornerstone for understanding how human beings navigate the tension between rational agency and emotional surrender.

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