

Love Has a Lot to Do

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I will argue that, despite the inherent risks in all forms of love of disappointment and rejection, rather than a second-class emotion as the song would have it, love has major existential significance.

Love is a word used to express complex human experiences. Grammatically love is a noun: affection, attraction based on sexual desire, admiration, benevolence, and/or common interests; a verb: to cherish, caress, fondle, copulate with, to desire actively, to seek and feel another's passion, devotion, and/or tenderness; and an adverb: Narcissus looked at his image in the pool lovingly, Helen remembered the setting of their first kiss lovingly, Bob looked at his pipe, that old friend, lovingly. As a particular feeling, in its origin in infancy, love (noun) involves mainly the attachment system for which safety and affection are foundational, and the caregiving system that is a prerequisite for attachment love. Additionally, the development of love as an experience involves the sensual, physiological, and exploratory systems. Once established, a feeling of affection and attraction, and the activity of cherishing and desiring, can be experienced in any motivational system where the treating of another, oneself, a group, or any setting or object lovingly (adverb) has great regulatory and survival significance. Despite all the positive qualities of love for human vitality and survival, affection, attraction, and desire easily activate possessiveness, envy, insensitive domination and exploitation, and expose the lover to possible humiliation, shame, and embarrassment.

Analytic theories of sexuality have failed to give adequate attention to the effects of parental responses of overt or tacit approval or disapproval to infant, toddler, and older children's specific pursuits of body pleasure. Freud's (1930) theory of instinctual development broadly recognized the significance of civilization's moral restrictions. However, traditional analytic emphasis on an endogenous unilateral unfolding of sexuality/libido has understated the effect of the moment to moment intersubjective interplay of responses of all those involved in the expressions of sensual and sexual desire. Each individual's love and loving in their conscious and unconscious manifestations unfold in the communal setting of caregivers, siblings, peers, playmates, best friends, and potential and actual mates. Each communal setting brings to bear a moral and ethical bias expressive of cultural values and individual proclivities. Throughout the developmental cycle parents and other authorities indicate to children those body pursuits they regard as approved, and those body pleasure pursuits they regard as prohibited, and shameful. The approved pursuits are retained as sensual pleasures to be enjoyed alone or shared, and are easily integrated into all aspects of love and loving. The prohibited pursuits remain as sexual activities and goals of heightened arousal that have covert shame-tinged conflictual aspects. The activation of sexuality always involves a degree of transgressing against the prohibition as well as subverting the dictates of authority. In the pursuit of heightened erotic and orgasmic pleasure, transgressing and subverting add to the excitement, but can easily spill over to lust devoid of affection.

Each individual's love and loving evidence the effect of an evolutionary potential for intraspecies affection, cooperation, and desire for pleasurable sensation and orgasmic

release, as well as antagonism, competition, jealousy, and envy. All the potential that is built in by evolution operates *dispositionally*. The dispositional potentialities accrued by each individual may be enhanced or diminished by each intersubjective context present throughout the entire lifecycle.

I distinguish between attachment love, romantic love, and lustful love, and lust without love. For all forms of love, the essential prerequisite experiences are the same: 1. A sense of safety based on the assurance that distress will be recognized and, to the degree possible, relieved. 2. An ability to send, recognize, and respond appropriately to clear signals of need, desire, and intention. 3. A shared current of sensual pleasure. 4. An appreciation and admiration of the physical and mental attributes, capacities, and achievements of the loved one, the self as lover and loved, and what the dyad cocreates.

Does the beatific smile exchanged between a mother and a three month old qualify as an experience we can call love, or are we accurately reading the mother, but adultifying the child? The answer for some theorists would be it is joy, a solely intrapsychic reaction rather than, an intersubjective sharing. Since I regard emotional experience to be one of the strongest threads that runs from birth to death, I view the sparkling positive emotional experience of mother and baby to be love, and that that experience of love has an essential continuity to the later and more complex childhood, adolescent, and adult forms of love. Without this affectionate foundation, the emergent erotic current is heavily at risk to be expressive of aggression in fantasy and/or action.

A secure attachment experience facilitates love, but it is not love in itself. Secure base experience makes mutual love more likely to occur than does insecure attachment. Through their seeking and then pushing off, ambivalently attached children are saying, “I

need your presence, comfort, and reassurance, but I don't trust you. Some of the time you present me with a security giving response and some of the time you are too distracted, angry, depressed, or frightened and that makes me feel insecure, fearful and angry also.” Ambivalently attached children can be wooed into a loving exchange, but their wariness about rejection and easily triggered anger adds a hate side to their loving.

Avoidantly attached children's potential for loving exchanges is severely compromised by their desperate strategy to protect themselves from rejection by not exposing their desires or their resentments. This strategy follows the principle that if the child doesn't actively seek or even know she desires loving response, she avoids exposure to responses of indifference, being angrily pushed away, shamed, or abused. She can then retain the fantasy and unconscious belief that she is loved and through her avoidance of opening herself to desire and resentment, she can retain the fantasy and unconscious belief that she is not only loved, but rather than angry, antagonistic, and suspicious, she is loving and lovable. Thus love survives for the ambivalently and avoidantly attached child, but is inextricably coupled with negative affects of anger and shame, tilting toward a playing out of themes of dominance or submission in erotic life or fear and sadness tilting toward a restricted or absent erotic life.

Parental sensitivity before and during the Oedipal phase, especially to the child's seeking of bodily pleasurable sensations, allows the child to preserve a shared low tension sensual current in their interactions and fantasies. However, the inevitability of every culture giving form to prohibitions about some erotic activities, dictates that the sexual and orgasmic desires of the four to six year old and of later romantic love will always include varying degrees of tension, conflict, and transgressive inclinations. At

any time, an established workable sensual/sexual balance may become pathologically dysregulated if caregivers, peers, teachers, ministers, or strangers exploit the child or adult's body for their own transgressive aggressive desires.

The tilt given by analytic theoreticians to a two-stage developmental sequence that begins with a matro-centric dyadic relationship to then be followed by a triadic relationship is contradicted by research evidence. Infants as early as three months of age when engaged in a playful proto-conversation with their mother will look over to their father implicitly inviting his participation. While the presumed drive-based assumption of a universal sadistic interpretation of bedroom activities (the primal scene) may have been overstated to be every child's governing vision of parental "love-making," children do struggle with the many for them insoluble mysteries about intercourse, fertilization, and birth. However, four to six-year-old children do have a great deal of information about their parent's relationship with each other, themselves, and their siblings. How do parents look at, touch, fondle, kiss one another? Does a rich sensual current run between them? Are they respectful or contemptuous? Does a gender putdown operate between them? How is the child's own gender responded to? Does the child conclude that being a boy -- or a girl -- is just fine with both parents or one parent and not the other?

In addition to gross abuse, four sources prevent or impair a child's or adult's dyadic or triadic loving relationship: collusive possessiveness, envy and jealousy, exploitation for the purpose of power and dominance, and narcissistic injuries about appearances and/or performance. In family triangle studies of an infant's first year, when instructed to take turns playing together, distinct patterns emerge. Some families cooperate with each parent sharing the infant's attention and smiles. In other families one

or the other parent vies for the infant's attention by attempting to induce the infant into a collusive shutting out on the other parent. A child entering the Oedipal phase who has become exclusively mother's or father's little boy or girl will be greatly impaired in maintaining a loving attachment to each parent while becoming romantically attracted to one or the other.

With or without pathological effect, envy and jealousy are easily aroused in the triangular enactments of desire and rivalry. Whatever preference one member of the triangle gets is apt to elicit jealousy in the rival. Whatever attractive physical attribute one member of the triangle has that gains him or her admiration and the ability to arouse erotically is apt to elicit envy of the other and humiliation and shame for the self. Envy and jealousy can be contained within an essentially loving romantic triangle adding spice to the rivalry and conquest. Or envy and jealousy can be as destructive to romantic love and friendship with a real or presumed rival as Shakespeare depicts in *A Winter's Tale* or as murderous to the loved one as in *Othello*. One risk factor for destructive envy and jealousy is the vulnerability of child or adult to doubt his or her effectiveness in being able to elicit and retain a loving sensual and/or sexual response. A second risk factor for destructive jealousy is the insensitivity or malevolence of the sought after loved one to humiliate the advances of the seeker, or the rival's contempt or sadism.

In middle childhood and early adolescence, dyadic and triadic attachment and sensual desires shift from centering on caregivers to same gender peers as "best friends." "In locker rooms, stimulated by each others naked bodies, boys will engage in towel fights, whooping and screaming in their sexual excitement. For girls particularly and to a degree for boys as well, "the shifting sands of best friend play out all the themes of later

romantic love. All of the elements of dyadic and triadic sensual relatedness unfold: the wooing; the coming together; the private and public pledges; the meaningful glances; the special language, jokes, and secrets; the rivalries; the temptations posed by a seductive other; the betrayer's abandonment; and the longings and lasting resentments on breaking up" (p 100). Particularly in younger adolescents, longing for the companionship of the best friend includes stirrings of more directly sexual desire that may be defended against or acted on.

In adolescence, the triadic relationships undergo further shifts. The object of romantic desire most often returns to the opposite gender, less often remains homoerotic, but in either case conscious or unconscious fantasy retains some degree of an ambiguous cross gender duality. The balance established in childhood between sensuality and sexuality tilts toward sexual orgasmic desire. With the adolescent shift toward desires for lustful love, changes occur in relationships with parents: less reliance on parents for physiological regulation; conflicted strategies to retain attachment security and sensual connection with the parents; frequent shifts of affiliation to groups that reflect more self-selection; greater facility for self-reliance in learning and recreation; an intensification of an aversive current inherent in the transgressive and subversive elements present in the break through of orgasmic pursuit. With increased self-reliance, and heightened transgressive and subversive inclinations in sexuality, because of their limited experience in assessing risks, adolescents may encounter experiences that are disruptive to their capacities for love: unwanted pregnancy, alcohol and drug abuse, venereal disease, HIV, rape, and painful exploitation and/or rejection.

When the only accepted goal of sexuality was regarded to be reproduction, any sexual practice that did not lead to that outcome could be defined as a *perversion* of evolution's or God's true purpose. With lustful love liberated from the goal of reproduction by less need for children as workers, the advent of contraception, the frequency of premarital, and extramarital sex, gay and lesbian coupling, and family planning, which practice of lustful love can be definitely regarded as *perversion*? A person might use his or her Eew! or revulsion factor to define what he or she regards as beyond the pale, indecent, or immoral. In a sociological situation in which paired relationships are of loving equals, and each person's subjectivity and desire are recognized and respected by the other, then consensually accepted sexual practices, whether procreative or not, cannot be regarded as perverse in a psychoanalytic "diagnostic" sense. The historic list of sadomasochism, fetishism, mutual masturbation, voyeurism, exhibitionism, cross dressing, and homosexuality when practiced as a consensual choice between two sensitive, caring individuals, constitutes an expression of sexual desire compatible with attachment and romantic love. Playing at power, say in a sadomasochistic script that can shift between which partner has it and which does not, is within lustful love; angrily, violently, vengefully wielding sexual power is lust without love. The key words that differentiate are playful, sensitive, recognizing and respecting the subjectivity and desire of the other, and equality and consensuality of choice – all components, outgrowths, and manifestations of love.

The elementary pattern of triadic relations that forms early in life becomes central to romantic love and rivalry in the Oedipal phase. The pattern shifts form in middle childhood and young adolescence to same-sex intense friendships, and generally shifts

again in later adolescence to opposite sex desire. A further pattern shift occurs in adult courting relationships to the seeking of a desired partner while competing successfully against real or feared rivals. Once courting ends with two people settling into a “committed relationship,” a new balance is struck between dyadic and triadic patterns. To Steven Mitchell's iconic question “Can Love Last” (2002), I ask: what form of love? The dyadic form of adult love characteristic of the attachment motivational system derives much of its lasting power from continuity with the foundation of intimacy and affection that begins in infancy: security, approval, commonality, admiration, and sharing of information that allows each to know the other deeply. The dyadic form of adult attachment love consolidates its lasting power from shared activity in each of the other motivational systems. Couples deal together with a host of physiological requirements. They often share a social, political, religious, and/or recreational affiliation. With children, pets, or friends, they may share caregiving. The exploration of interest -- literature, movies, TV, travel, decorating, art, music, sports, world events, and particularly gossip -- presents a wide and flexible variety of preferences for sharing or trading off. Aversiveness is an integral aspect of any successful lasting commitment -- how to “play at” shifting roles of domination, argue fairly and know when to withdraw, and most of all how to repair disruptions. Finally while expressions of inevitable differences of opinion can enliven the attachment, an abiding sensual current is a necessary ingredient for maintaining a satisfying level of affection, even if romantic and lustful love have diminished.

Even for the committed dyad, triadic patterns persist in their romantic and lustful love. There are “potentially, in fantasy, always six persons in the bed together, the

couple, their respective unconscious Oedipal rivals, and their unconscious Oedipal ideals” (Kernberg, 1995, p 88). “For each person connecting his or her actual relationship with the secret fantasy of the actual or fantasy other may both enhance the romantic moment and be a form of depreciating and betraying the partner” (Lichtenberg, 2008, p 122). The persistence of these triadic patterns activates tension and conflict in actual and fantasied enactments of romantic and lustful love. Unconscious fantasies of desired other partners and conscious practices of “forbidden” acts add transgressive excitement, but may also trigger depreciation, guilt and shame. Belief by one partner that the other has actual or fantasied preference for a rival introduces in romantic and lustful love a degree of apprehension and a potential for jealousy and suspicion.

Unfortunately, lust without love occurs all too frequently as evidenced by the long history of sexualized violence against women conducted in hot passionate rage or cold dehumanized indifference. Rape, gang rape, serial killing, politically inspired rape as in Darfur, erotic arousing battering, even cannibalism and necrophilia have been personified in such characters as Jack the Ripper, Bluebeard, Hannibal Lecter, and Dracula. Gidden (1992) claims that “a large amount of male sexual violence now stems from insecurity and inadequacy rather than from a seamless continuation of patriarchal dominance. Violence is a destructive reaction to the waning of the female complicity” (p. 122). In my view, contemporary sexual violence may be spurred by the waning of female compliance, but that can only be one source of a long historical playing out of violence between the sexes. In the many traumatic experiences of life -- war, hunger, and tribalism -- love and loving and passion for caring about others is hard to maintain. Women may be the source, the target, or the perpetrator of the hatred that fuels sexual

violence. Perfidy and betrayal by men is a factor in women's eruptive aggression (Medea) whether the perpetrators are fathers or brothers in childhood or destructive relationships in later life.

In conclusion, between affection, desire, and delight in objects, settings, pets, and aesthetics, between attaching and caregiving, friendship and rivalry, romance and lust, sensuality and sexuality, love has a lot of important tasks to do. I hope I have succeeded in my argument that, despite the inherent risks of disappointment and rejection, envy and jealousy, domination and exploitation, love in its many forms has major existential significance.

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