

The Joys and Pains of Love: An Emotional Intelligence Framework

Bianca Briciu PhD. Saint Paul University, Providence School of

Transformative Leadership and Spirituality

“For even as love crowns you so shall [it] shall crucify you. Even as [it] is for your growth so is [it] for your pruning. Even as [it] ascends to your height and caresses your most tender branches that quiver in the sun, So shall [it] descend to your roots and shake them in their clinging to the earth.” (excerpt from Khalil Gibran, On Love)

Introduction

Is love a single emotion or a constellation of emotions associated either with happiness or with pain? Is it subjective or intersubjective? To what extent our experience of love is shaped by cultural norms and to what extent is it a manifestation of personal freedom? This chapter unpacks our predominant myth about romantic love and explores the complex emotions that create the architecture of love. Recent research on the psychology of emotions reveals great complexity in the constant negotiation between the self and the outside world (Feldman Barrett, 2017). Love is both a subjective (personal) and intersubjective (interpersonal) emotion, experienced as an inner state of the self and as a shared affect. Contrary to the romantic myth of eternal, unchanging love, the emotion of love is in a constant state of change. Using an emotional intelligence framework, I will presently discuss the relationship between romantic love and the positive emotions of joy, intimacy and compassion as well as love’s associations with the negative emotions of fear, shame and guilt. Love and emotional intelligence are correlated: the more aware and intentional we

become about our emotional life, the easier it is to experience the positive, mutual flow of love rather than its painful, alienating manifestations. In other words, developing emotional intelligence allows us to experience more agency in the way we give and receive love. We are both the objects and subjects of love and better understanding of our emotions helps us develop a wisdom of the heart, living love with more intentionality and freedom. Emotional intelligence makes agency possible in our experiences of love.

Emotions as Messengers of the Feedback Loop Between the Self and the World

What is the source of emotions? They arise at the interface between the self and the outside world as the result of the organism's self-regulatory feedback loop giving us information about painful or pleasant internal and external stimuli (Kauffman, 2019). "Emotions, quite literally, build the deepest foundation of mind in living systems; they remain central to all aspects of human development, moral conscience and spiritual experience, ultimately delivering the collective "wisdom of the heart" (Kauffman, 2019, p. 66). Emotions mostly arise at an unconscious level but the more we bring them into our awareness, the more we can influence their function and impact on our lives. They have a double function; first to regulate the stability and immunity of the mind/body and second, to develop and expand the creative capacities of the mind/body. According to the interaction between the self and the environment that can respond to or deny our deepest needs, emotions can be associated with either pleasure (positive emotions) or

pain (negative emotions). Positive emotions are markers of optimal bodily, mental and social functioning (Kauffman, 2019). Negative emotions are felt as painful experiences and they are markers of problematic adaptation, conflicting desires or denial of needs. The self-regulatory mechanism of emotions creates an approach or avoid motivational behavior that for most of time runs under the radar of our consciousness. The self-development mechanism of emotions concerns empathic expansion of boundaries and actualization of potential (Kauffman, 2019, p. 69). Only recently have emotions become the focus of psychology, neuroscience and developmental education, especially given the success of the concept of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is defined as the ability to recognize our own and other people's emotions and respond to them in adequate ways (Goleman, 2012).

Emotional intelligence has been explored and applied in the areas of interpersonal relationships and leadership development but here I will explore how positive and negative emotions structure our experiences of love. Emotional intelligence refers to five interdependent dimensions of experience: self-awareness, self-expression, interpersonal relationships, decision making and stress management (Stein and Book, 2011). Only the interpersonal dimension specifically refers to empathy, love, compassion and the ability to develop constructive relationships with other people but all other dimensions have an impact on the way experience of love. A study done in 2008 by Zeidner and Kaluda revealed that, "emotionally intelligent couples may communicate

more effectively, may handle conflicts effectively, and regulate their emotions better, thus facilitating adaptive solutions and outcomes” (p. 1685).

Many psychologists understand love as an experience of self-awareness and self-growth through both positive and negative emotions (Borysenko, 1990; Tatkin, 2012; Lewis et. al., 2000). Others argue that true love can only be experienced in a psychological context of emotional maturity (Hendricks, 2009; Fromm, 1989). Love in all its manifestations uncovers for us the reality of having a soul that we share with others. It brings into our awareness who we are as relational beings, opening the self to its manifestation of interbeing. “Love’s promise is that if we are willing to see your relationships as teachers, rather than discard or demean them if they disappoint us, they will lead us to becoming more self-aware, forgiving and capable of making choices that create happiness and peace of mind” (Borysenko, 1990, ch. 9, par.7, Kindle Ed.).

In an interview with Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh (2015), a young person asks him why Buddhism doesn’t support romantic love and demonstrations of affection between two people.¹ Thich Nhat Hanh replies highlighting the centrality of the concept of true love in Buddhism. Romantic love is one manifestation of this true love if we recognize in it the following four qualities: loving kindness or the desire for the happiness of the other person, compassion or the desire for relief from suffering of the other person, joy and inclusiveness or intimacy. (Nhat Hanh, interview, 2015) Is this an overly idealized version of romantic love that is impossible to experience or is it an opportunity to examine the more complex emotional aspects

of love? I will show here that love has a complex emotional structure that changes as a result of the constant negotiation between the inner world of the self and the inner world of the other. Some emotions articulate love as an experience of happiness and satisfaction for both partners while others bring psychological suffering in the experience of love. Our ability to experience the richness and depth of love depends on our ability to navigate the array of emotions that form the intersubjective structure of love. It also depends on our ability to free ourselves from the ties that bind us: ideologies based on inequality and self-sacrifice, gender stereotypes, cultural and familial norms that define love in restrictive or unequal ways, attachment wounds, unhealthy emotional patterns of guilt and shame.

The Myth of Eternal, Unchanging Love

The myth of a miraculous love at first sight in which two soulmates find one another and they live happily ever after fulfilling each other's needs and desires pervades our modern notion of love from Disney animations to mainstream films and social media. In this myth love is a universal force that works through two people and they merely enjoy its happy outcome in a timeless continuum. This concept of love is one brief and intense manifestation of love characterized in psychology as the passionate love that typically lasts up to 2 years and it is based on intense sexual attraction, exhilaration and the pleasant flooding of our brains with endorphins (Fisher, TEDtalk, 2018; Gottman, 2000). This is the type of love with the highest intensity, an inexhaustible source of wonder, creativity and idealization. What happens when we come down

from the high of this love relationship? As we go deeper in the experience of being with another person, we discover our inner and the inner world of our partner. The journey of our individual development or destruction of love starts where the films and stories end: at the union of two partners. This is the place where the noun of love turns into the verb to love, from an emotion to an ongoing negotiation. The Western myth of romantic love tells us little about its dynamic nature, about the ways it interacts with other emotions and about our own agency as lovers. Sexologist Esther Perel (2018) cautions us that “to love” is a skill that is cultivated, not merely a state of enthusiasm. It is dynamic and active imbued with intention and responsibility. And it is a verb” (“Seven verbs...,” 2018).

Emotions give us information coming from the self-regulatory loop between the organism and the outside world having two functions: self-regulation and self-development. Love moves between these two forms of interaction between the self and the outside world. Love is first experienced as the joyful emotion of falling in love, a manifestation of attraction and desire that produces intense euphoric states when love is reciprocated. It is an emotion of expansion and development, when we open up to the other. The second stage of love is the entry into intimacy, an intersubjective empathic exploration of the world of the other that can either activate emotions of security and calm or of intense fear and discomfort. The third and more difficult aspect of love is the encounter of suffering, pain and darkness in the world of the other and/or our own. At this stage love can either disappear, suffocated by protection mechanisms against suffering or become

enriched by compassion and deeper knowledge. . This stage can activate positive emotions of trust, growth and gratitude but it can also create co-dependent relationships based on the painful emotions of shame and guilt. These negative emotions are the result of unequal gender relationships and the family structure that relegates caregiving exclusively to mothers. I will first explore the dynamic constellation of love and positive emotions as manifestation of happiness and joy. The second part will be concerned with the pain of love through its association with the difficult emotions of fear, shame and guilt. Love as an experience of joy and happiness is one of the powerful emotions that have led psychologists to talk about similarities between love and addiction (Fisher, 1994).

The First Stage of Love: The World's Most Powerful Drug

Anthropologist Helen Fisher, an expert on romantic love states that “romantic love is one of the most powerful sensations on earth” (TEDtalk, 2008). She talks poetically about the joy of love and the pain of losing it, the intense elation, exhilaration and happiness people feel when they fall in love. The joy of falling in love and the pain of unreciprocated or unfulfilled love are the most commonly described experiences in myths, stories, film and media. Our collective knowledge of love consists mostly of this short-lived intense manifestation of love that includes sexual desire and attraction. Falling in love is experienced by the brain as a powerful rush of dopamine and it activates the same brain region that is active during a rush of cocaine. Passionate love has been described by many psychologists as an addiction (Fisher, Brown and Strong, 2010). The brain

regions associated with love are below the cortex, below even the limbic system in regions associated with the bodily functions of hunger and thirst (Fisher, TEDtalk, 2008). The joy of love is associated with a loss of self and an obsessive thinking about another person. The world's greatest poetry expresses the joy of love or the pain of losing it.

The experience of romantic love leads to intense, even ecstatic manifestations of happiness. A study done by Dorothy Tennov (1998) based on interviews with over 500 men and women, identified a constellation of traits for being in love: first, a person becomes significant (salience), second, people experience intrusive thoughts and fantasies about the desired person to the level of obsession, crystallization, idealization, intense energy, euphoria, loss of control. Love is experienced as a chemical flooding with pleasure neurotransmitters. These views are echoed by studies in positive psychology where love is invariably given a place of honor as one of the multiple behavioral and psychological skills conducive to happiness (Lyubomirsky, 2008; Seligman, 2012). However, the intense joy and exhilaration experienced in the first stages of love is different from the more stable and subdued happiness interspersed with conflict that comes from long term intimate relationships. Psychologist John Gottman (2000) speaks about this experience as the first stage of a relationship which is usually short lived and intense, followed by the second phase, which is the building of trust and intimacy. At this stage, each partner holds an idealized image of the desired one and love becomes a mirror of our best selves. Sociologist Eva Illouz (2012) states that, "to be in love is to overcome a sense of ordinary invisibility and

entails a sense of uniqueness and an increased sense of self-worth” (Kindle ed., ch. 4 section 2, par.3). It is difficult to let go of this idealized experience of our best self and the best self of the other. In our contemporary society with less emphasis on social status, love is a subjective experience that validates the self. “Being loved generates a feeling of intense personal importance. I matter. You confirm my significance” (Perel, p. 43).

This first stage of love is our cultural myth of romantic love, with films and stories ending either with the union of the partners or with their tragic suffering at the impossibility of union. There is little cultural presence of the transformation of romantic love after the union (sexual consummation, marriage or long-term partnership). The emotions of joy and intense happiness are what we most commonly associate with love. This emotional experience of love is associated with knowledge of the idealized other. We are our best selves and we see the best self in the other, we experience an opening of the world. The initial stages of love are surrounded by a mystical glow since these are the times when we become intensely aware of having a soul. Joy is experienced on the condition of mutuality in the love relationship and our only agency is to allow ourselves to be swept away and move towards the person we are attracted to.

Loving means also becoming vulnerable and exposed to risk, especially given the interpersonal nature of this emotion. Our happiness depends on someone else. Woe on those whose love is not reciprocated or is made impossible by social norms. Romeo and Juliette, Tristan and Isolde, Cleopatra and Anthony, the pantheon of tragic lovers has fed the romantic imagination for

centuries. The pain of unreciprocated or unfulfilled love is as intense as the joy of falling in love. As Fisher states, “around the world people love. They sing for love, they dance for love, they compose songs and stories about love, they tell myths and legends about love, they pine for love, they live for love, they kill for love, they die for love” (TEDtalk, 2008). Love gives meaning and intensity to one’s life, which is why the termination of love can be experienced as a symbolic death of the self, a traumatic experience. The commonly used language metaphor for this experience is of a broken heart. “When the romantic rejection is perceived as irrevocable, it is a humiliating blow to our self-esteem, as it reflects a significant negative evaluation of our worth... Romantic rejection involves not only the frustration of an unfulfilled desire, but also an impoverished and ravaged self-esteem” (Ben-Ze'ev and Goussinsky, 2012, ch. 2). The danger of unrequited love is exacerbated according to Ilouz in our contemporary world where we rely less on social and class recognition and more on the recognition of the self as an affirmation of our worth (Ilouz, 2012, ch. 4, section 2). Relationship problems are an important cause for depression and suicide according to a report by The Center for Supportive Relationships published in 2018. Love can be life-giving or life threatening depending on reciprocation and conditions that allow it. It is a complex emotion that is lived intersubjectively and it flourishes in conditions of reciprocity. The first stage of falling in love is our cultural definition of love, where love manifests itself as an external force that unites us with the other. What happens to love after the mythical

union prevalent in our cultural myth of love? In the next part I will explore the second stage of love and its association with intimacy and empathy.

The Second Stage of Love: Intimacy as Expansion of the Self

Intimacy expands our soul as we allow another person to enter our inner world and we enter theirs. The expansive outcome of love means the dissolution of some boundaries between self and the beloved. Neuroscientists talk about the desire for connection and intimacy as a fundamental human drive that starts with our inherent long-term vulnerability after being born. Intimacy replicates patterns of early attachment since it relies on two fundamental beliefs: trust and a sense of self-worth. We need to trust that the other person will respond adequately to our needs and will not abandon or hurt us, in other words, we need to feel safe in the presence of the other. As Diane Poole-Heller (2019) observed, “being comfortable in your own skin and having tools that help you relax is a really big deal but learning how to feel safe with others is revolutionary” (p.19). We also need to have a healthy enough sense of our own worth and our inherent lovability. These two fundamental beliefs are the result of our interaction with our primary caregiver and they form attachment patterns (Tatkin, 2012). If our caregiver was sufficiently attuned to our needs and found our existence enjoyable and valuable, we developed a secure attachment style, which makes us the lucky possessors of a knack for intimate relationships.

Intimacy means the development of love towards true knowledge of the beloved and making oneself known to the beloved. As Lewiss et al. (2000) state, “adult love depends critically upon

knowing the other. In love demands only the brief acquaintance necessary to establish an emotional genre but does not demand that the book of the beloved's soul be perused from preface to epilogue. Loving derives from intimacy, the prolonged and detailed surveillance of a foreign soul" (ch.9, section 3, par.10, Kindle ed.). The authors point out that intimacy implies a different experience than the state of being in love, the short-lived experience of passionate attraction. It implies curiosity, attention, acceptance and communication. For sociologist Anthony Giddens (1993) intimacy is the modern positive outcome of democratic love relationships. "Intimacy implies a wholesale democratizing of the interpersonal domain, in a manner fully compatible with democracy in the public sphere" (Giddens, 1993, introduction, Kindle Ed.). Intimacy implies emotional fulfilment and safety for both partners in a relationship and it is based on mutual disclosure and acceptance. The very definition of intimacy presupposes mutuality and equal participation. Giddens argues that women's advances in the social world and more egalitarian gender relationships led to a radical transformation in romantic relationships based on the value of intimacy (1993).

In intimacy we treat the needs of our beloved as our own. Intimacy means open hearted knowledge about another person and awareness about ourselves. With knowledge also comes responsibility and danger. Do we want someone to know us completely? Do we feel authentic in the intimate relationship or do we play a role that we show the other person based on what we think he/she may like? Role playing is especially powerful in gender scripts since much of our

relational identity is predicated on gender norms: we feel compelled to play feminine scripts if we are women or masculine scripts if we are men (Butler, 2004). We play along the gender expectations of the other, sometimes losing touch with our true self. Intimacy takes romantic love to a new level of awareness and problematization of gender identity. Intimacy implies a strong level of emotional expressivity and a certain degree of self-awareness, which makes it difficult especially for men who find it harder to analyze and expose their emotions (Rossi, 1985). Intimacy is our contemporary antidote to the loneliness of our global displacement and uprootedness. It makes us experience an expansion of our soul into the soul of another. Instead of feeling isolated and insignificant in the vastness of human existence, we have a sense of belonging, a sharing of our self with someone else. Intimacy is also a source of self-awareness, as we get to know ourselves better in relation to our beloved.

The need for intimacy puts a great strain on relationships, which now become journeys of reciprocal discovery with the heavy burden of bestowing existential meaning. Transformations in social structure coming with industrialization, the move to cities, migration and others have weakened communal ties. Romantic love and intimate relationships have remained the last center of deep interpersonal meaning and fulfillment. “Today we turn to one person to provide what an entire village once did: a sense of grounding, meaning, and continuity. At the same time, we expect our committed relationships to be romantic as well as sexually fulfilling...” (Perel, 2009, p. 13).

Intimacy is one manifestation of love related to security, calm, safety and connection. All couple counsellors highlight the importance of intimacy for the health of a romantic relationship. Tatkin (2012) uses the metaphor of “couple bubble” to describe the importance of creating an intimate space of safety and feeling cared for that serves as a nurturing ground for our individual endeavors. If we create a couple bubble, the sense of safety and support in a relationship will make us stronger as individuals. We can take more risks if we feel understood, cared for and supported. “The couple bubble is an agreement to put the relationship before everything else. It means putting your partner’s well-being, self-esteem, and distress relief first. And it means your partner does the same for you” (Tatkin, 2012, p. 17). The ethical implication of this definition is not to be underestimated. You entrust your welfare to your beloved and he/she does the same. Tatkin sees intimacy as one of the main reason people pair up, in response to an innate human desire to feel safe and cared for. Intimacy transforms love from an emotion into a decision and the promise of commitment to the relationship, it invites us to exercise agency and intention.

Intimacy creates an environment of knowing the other that helps partners contribute to each other’s happiness and reduce each other’s distress. Psychologist Gary Chapman (2015) used the five love languages as a framework for knowing each other’s patterns of behavior that activate feelings of love and security. Monitoring our behavior to respond to the needs of the partner reduces distress and increases feelings of satisfaction in relationships. Intimacy is also seen as

attunement, the ability to sense each other's states and bond through this experience (Gottman, 2000, p. 24). Attunement allows the partners to understand the perspective of the other even when it is different. Intimacy relies on trust and commitment to make the relationship work. It activates our empathic abilities to grasp the perspectives of another and share their emotional space. While intimacy promises security in a relationship, a state of calm and connection, it is also a dangerous reminder of our vulnerability. Vulnerability is experienced as a negative trait for people who live the cultural values of individualism and autonomy. As love enters the area of intimacy, it comes against the powerful negative emotion of fear that will be explored in the second part of the paper. The third stage of love is the encounter of darkness, pain or difficult aspects of one's inner world and/or the inner world of one's partner that creates crisis in romantic relationships. When love enters crisis, it can either develop the capacities for compassion or it can slowly die out.

The Third Stage of Love: Compassion as Ethical Love

To what extent does romantic love include the quality of compassion? Compassion means the "sensitivity to the pain or suffering of another, coupled with a deep desire to alleviate that suffering" (Goetz, Keltner, & Simon-Thomas, 2010). Compassion has been an emotion associated with religious practices and spiritual life and very rarely has it been considered in relation to romantic love. When scholars focused on the relationship between romantic love and compassion, it was mostly in discussions about co-dependent relationships (Amodeo,

2017). Compassion is the positive outcome of the test of fire for a love relationship, overcoming the stage of crisis. The first aspect of compassion means to empathically feel the emotions experienced by the person who is suffering (Batson, 1991). “Feeling the emotions of a person who is suffering can create genuine concern and caring and/or lead to feelings of empathic distress” (Ekman and Ekman, 2017, p. 3).

Compassion has the dual dimension of emotion and impetus to action, perceiving suffering and attempting to reduce it. Romantic love offers some of the most memorable experiences of relief from suffering through emotional, financial, physical support partners offer to one another. It is a promise people make to one another during their marriage vows, which some of them may regret later. Compassion has been mostly considered in its ethical dimension as an affective state with clear implications for prosocial behavior, caregiving, and relationship formation (Batson, 1991; Goetz et al., 2010). What happens with couples when either one of the partners or both of them encounter hardships and diverse manifestations of distress? How does love change as a result of crisis? Compassion is an important emotional enrichment of romantic love that ensures the survival of long-term relationships. Compassion adds to romantic love the ethical dimension of responsibility to care for one another in times of need, to be together in sickness and in health. It implies that we continue to love our partner as he/she experiences suffering, physical or mental and we support the partner attempting to alleviate his/her distress. When partners can

contribute to the alleviation of their lover's suffering compassion becomes the mark of strength in a romantic relationship.

Romantic love stories that show compassion are inspiring for audiences because they show a deep, spiritual aspect of love: losing oneself to save someone else. Dedication and self-sacrifice are noble spiritual virtues in relationships based on equality. The film *Breathe* (Andy Serkis, 2017) for example, dramatizes the story of Robin Cavendish who became paralyzed from the neck down at age 28. His wife, Diana takes him home from the hospital despite the strenuous work involved in caring after him. She and their friends help design and build a wheelchair, eventually travelling with Robin and pioneering the use of wheelchair to provide a good quality of life to paralyzed people. This is an inspiring film because in the midst of suffering and death wishes, Diana finds a way to offer her husband hope, relief and a life that also includes joyful moments. This also means that she chooses to share his suffering and the hardship of caring for him. The story presented by the film brings vividly to our consciousness the important ingredient of compassion in romantic relationships. Compassion makes us care for the loved ones in times of difficulty. What happens when only one of the partners is in charge of caring and compassion is required not only temporarily but on a long-term basis? The ethical dimension of compassion in romantic relationships has lost its appeal because of its association with unequal gender relationships and the feminization of caregiving.

Feminist analyses of the association between love and caregiving brought attention to patterns of female self-sacrifice for the well-being of the partner, a dynamic that may have been virtuous in spiritual practices of service and dedication to the welfare of others but not in gender relationships. The feminization of caregiving turned the compassionate aspect of love into an imbalanced emotional relationship, the way women loved their partners. If men have been defined as providers in a couple, women's roles as caregivers basically equated femininity to selfless dedication to serving others. Women were supposed to be emotionally attuned to their children and husbands and respond adequately to their needs. The ethical dimension of compassion in love relationships has been colonized by the feminization of caregiving and the unilateral transformation of love into compassion as women's ordained role within the family. According to cultural theorist Sarah Ahmed (2004), "the reproduction of femininity is tied up with the reproduction of the national idea through the work of love" (p. 124). Love in its articulation as compassion, caregiving and selfless devotion has been emphasized as women's domestic role and has been stripped of its social power. This does not diminish the ethical aspect of compassion and its spiritual dimension of selflessness and care, of empathy and support. It only brings attention to the fact that compassion needs to be experienced as an intersubjective, mutual experience in equal relationships. The next section focuses on the negative emotions that accompany love, exploring their psychological and social basis. We generally assume love hurts only when it disappears but the next section shows love can hurt even when it is present.

Shame and Guilt-Compassion Under Oppression

The shadow side of compassion in romantic intimacy is the co-dependent relationship, which was normalized in the context of unequal gender relationships. The co-dependent relationship has been pathologized in the last few decades when women's happiness and life satisfaction had become a public concern. Feminist writer Adrienne Rich (1976) poignantly showed that caregiving in the modern institution of motherhood was extended to caregiving for all members of the family and it was in most cases a disempowering experience for women. While men found in marriage a home to return to, the married women had to make the home, to be the home, even when they worked. The modern nuclear family and the division of labor assigned caregiving to women, perpetuating gender inequalities in relationships and defining compassion as women's nature. The modern institution of marriage relying on economic dependence, "chained women in links of love and guilt", it denied caregiving as work, it made women responsible for the mental health of family members (Rich, 281-282). Rich brought to light the oppressive mothering conditions in nuclear families predominant in industrial societies." The physical and psychic weight of responsibility on the woman with children is by far the heaviest of social burdens" (Rich, 1976, 52). Mothers were supposed to raise children according to patriarchal norms and were made responsible for the physical and mental health of all the family members, including their partners. Rich pointed out two assumptions that were particularly harmful to mothers. First was the assumption that mothering was natural to women and as such,

child rearing was the sole responsibility of the biological mother. Second was the practice that did not give women power to determine the conditions under which they mothered. Modern societies created the ideal of self-sacrificial, intense motherhood that reduced women's subjectivities to their maternal identities within marriage. Sociologist Nancy Chodorow (1999) argued that women's caregiving positions in the family created deeply seated gender differences that reproduced a family system where men were more concerned with power and domination while women were more concerned with emotions and relationships. This marriage arrangement in which women were the primary caregivers created unequal gender differences that led to co-dependent relationships where love was overshadowed by dependence on control and approval. Typically, men needed control and women needed approval in this type of relationship. Under these unequal gender arrangements, compassion in romantic love turned from a virtue into its opposite: it created deeply unequal gendered articulations of love.

It seems an ironic twist that compassion as one of the most valued religious qualities was assigned to women in marriage arrangements. When the valued emotion of compassion was exercised in disempowering structural arrangements of caregiving, it led not to the positive values highlighted in spiritual contexts but the vast array of guilty mothers in the pantheon of psychotherapy. Instead of mother goddesses that had unconditional compassion and spent their lives in self-sacrificial attempts to relieve members of the family of suffering, women got to bear the brunt of cultural blame and participated in creating deeply unhealthy gender relationships.

While compassion is a highly regarded virtue in many religions, mothers' compassion lived under oppressive patriarchal structures paved the way for painful patterns of romantic love, especially for women.

The emotions of shame and guilt dominate the patterns of co-dependent relationships. The term was first used in the field of addiction treatment to refer to relationships that were feeding addictive patterns and caregiving behaviors. One person was the addicted and the other person was the caregiver. This relationship pattern is in itself addictive and as such can become associated with negative emotions. "Co-dependence is an addiction to control and approval" and it is marked by inequality in relationships (Hendricks and Hendricks, 1990, p.8). "When we are co-dependent, we don't have relationships, we have entanglements. Relationships can only exist between equals; inequality is a mark of co-dependence" (Hendricks and Hendricks, 1990, p. 7). The caregiver typically tries to alleviate suffering for the partner but ends up increasing distress and perpetuating the co-dependent cycle. The more shame and guilt the addicted person feels, the more compassion is needed from the other person to forgive and tolerate harmful behavior. In this case, compassion becomes a powerless emotion dominated by shame and guilt.

Shame is a powerful emotion of feeling unworthy, defective or damaged. It is the emotional source of destructive behavior that leads to addiction. Psychologist John Bradshaw (2005), an expert on shame, states that "intimacy is the number one problem resulting from internalized shame...Intimacy requires the ability to be vulnerable. To be intimate is to risk exposing our

inner selves to each other, to bare our deepest feelings, desires and thoughts” (p. 235). Shame based people form co-dependent relationships dominated by the fear of abandonment and rejection, where the goal is not happiness but one’s ability to control one’s partner. Instead of an equal partner, one looks for a nurturing, compassionate parent image who can make up for the failures of one’s real parents. What the shame-based person rejects in himself/herself gets projected onto the partner. “One of the most damaging aspects of shame-based relationships is the projecting of our disowned parts onto our partner” (Bradshaw, 2005 p. 237). Romantic love for Bradshaw needs to start from self-compassion and the psychological journey to wholeness (Bradshaw, 2005, p. 238). Shame based people suffer from lack of self-worth and they need the partner’s unconditional love but their alleviation of suffering in relationship is only partial and temporary. Their partners become mired in empathic distress or compassion fatigue, a negative experience of compassion that destroys love.

Guilt is another difficult emotion usually working in relationship with shame that comes from an unhealthy sense of responsibility for outcomes and situations that are not within our control. Psychologist Joan Borysenko (1990) refers to a pattern of constant worrying, perfectionism, people-pleasing, compulsive helping behavior. “Unhealthy guilt is an autoimmune disease of the soul that causes us to literally reject our own worth as human beings...Unhealthy guilt causes life to become organized around the need to avoid fear rather than the desire to share love” (Borysenko, 1990, loc. 442). Guilt is the emotional counterpart of shame, making the partner in a

co-dependent relationship locked in compulsive caregiving behavior haunted by helplessness. People driven by guilt are the self-sacrificing martyrs who suffer the difficulties of an unequal and sometimes harmful romantic love relationship in order to atone for their constant failure to redeem the other. Their compassion turns into guilt and they abandon their own needs for happiness and fulfilment in order to atone for a perceived failure. People who experience love relationships filtered through the emotion of guilt are typically coming from families with addictions or unhealthy relational patterns. We can see the co-dependent patterns of shame and guilt as powerful emotional patterns that cement a relationship through the perpetuation of patterns of suffering and addiction to control or approval. Working through guilt and shame means developing skills of emotional intelligence that free us from unconscious compulsions to perpetuate mutual suffering in relationships instead of mutual satisfaction.

There is hope that more and more relationships are becoming partnership based rather than co-dependent. Riane Eisler (2012) explains two cultural patterns that divide cultures: the dominator, relying more on power and pain to structure social relationships and the partnership pattern that relies more on pleasure and mutuality in social structuring (Eisler, ch.1, section 2, Kindle ed.). As child-rearing practices have become more caring and less abusive in contemporary Western societies (a state where abuse became the exception rather than the norm), romantic love relationships have also become more egalitarian (Eisler, Kindle ed. 2012, ch. 10, section 4). In this context compassion can become a gender free manifestation of ethical love as concern

with the suffering of the beloved and the commitment to care and support one's partner through difficult experiences for both men and women. The next section will explore the negative emotion of fear and its two main causes in its association with love: the value of individualism and mistrust arising from traumatic experiences. Love lived in fear becomes a painful experience rather than a happy one.

Fear of Intimacy-Love as Vulnerability

Why do we fear love? Love entails dependency, vulnerability and openness to another person, which can be difficult from the point of view of individualist values. Dependency in an individualist context means weakness while entrusting your well-being to someone else is seen as a dangerous endeavor. Autonomy is coded as a proof of power and decisiveness while one's well-being is a matter of personal concern. Intimacy seems from the vantage point of individualism as a murky, dangerous experience of abandoning yourself to the beloved, a frightful sign of vulnerability. "The ethic of individual self-fulfillment and achievement is the most powerful current in modern society. The choosing, deciding, shaping human being who aspires to be the author of his or her own life, the creator of an individual identity, is the central character of our time" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 22-3). The focus on individual self-fulfillment led to experiences of love that are more subjective than intersubjective, more concerned with the satisfaction of the more empowered partner. Sociologists warn us of the rise of relationships that are short lived and devoid of intimacy. They express concern over a "cult of individuality in

relationships that oversteps its bounds, creating not healthily interdependent relationships but instead bonds characterized by excessive independence and detachment; relationships that may be opted out of at a moment's notice for purely personal reasons (Bauman, 2003; Cherlin, 1999).

The value of individualism relegates intimacy to a dangerous trap. Every individual must preserve his/her independence, each one is responsible for his/her well-being and there is less willingness to accept the difficulties and the inner work required by intimacy. Despite the enthusiasm expressed by Giddens that we are now entering an era of mutually satisfying intimate relationships that replicate the democratic values of equal participation, Eva Illouz's (2012) sociological study shows sobering evidence that the large dating market creates relationship patterns based on imbalance between supply and demand, where the desire for intimacy puts (generally women) at a disadvantage. In other words, the dating market create an economic pattern of large supply of sexual encounters (available women) but short supply of intimacy (men willing to commit), as a great majority of men show a phobia of commitment. "...commitment phobia is related to the fundamental transformations in the ecology of choice that allow men to control the terms of the sexual bargain" (Illouz, loc. 2195 Kindle ed.). In this overvaluation of independence and personal pleasure, partners replicate the tenets of the consumer culture. Sexual desire and its consummation become the romantic relationship par excellence. Illouz shows that our contemporary version of romance has been commercialized through sexual attraction and the ideal of "sexiness" (2012, p. 42). Intimacy is associated not with mutual emotional satisfaction

but with the constraints and whims imposed by another person. It is seen as an infringement on personal freedom and pleasure. Pleasure is the most valued outcome in these types of relationships.

The second reason fear turns the experience of intimacy into a painful one is attachment wounding. Despite our human drive for connection and expansion of the self, every experience of intimacy recreates patterns that activate childhood emotional memories and memories of previously painful experiences. Every failed love hardens our hearts a little. Intimacy and independence are learned early in life in relation to our primary attachment figure, in our experiences with our parents. As a result of interacting with our primary caregiver, we develop two basic beliefs. First is the trust that the world is a safe space when we are alone, and we can count on others to respond to our needs. The second belief is in our self-worth or value as people and trust that we are loved and lovable (Tatkin, 2012). Early traumatic experiences of abandonment, betrayal or rejection create unhealthy relational patterns in adulthood. When our primary caregiver was not present or emotionally attuned, we have formed two unhealthy attachment patterns: anxious or ambivalent attachment style and dismissing-avoidant style (Poole-Heller, 2019, p.13). The anxious attachment pattern manifests as low self-esteem, high anxiety in relationships and the permanent fear of not being loved and not being worthy of love, high sensitivity to negative cues from others.

The dismissing avoidant attachment pattern consists in avoiding intimacy and withdrawing when there is difficulty in relationships. People with this attachment style create an absolute self-reliance that makes love difficult. Both patterns are haunted by fear of intimacy, which becomes a constant source of distress. These patterns are the result of traumatic interactions with one's primary caregiver at a stage complete helplessness and dependence. People with one of these patterns do not trust relationships and they fear the vulnerability of opening up to intimacy (Levine and Heller, 2012). Neuroscientist Stan Tatkin (2012) uses the metaphors of "anchor" for the securely attached people, "island" for dismissing avoidant and "wave" for the anxious avoidant people who have push and pull patterns of acceptance and rejection of intimacy (p.5). Studies on attraction have shown that we are attracted by people who make us feel familiar emotions, not necessarily positive emotions (Lewis et.al., 2000). We reenact familiar scenarios of intimate relationships that we felt or witnessed in our family of origin. The structure of the modern family creates specific emotional patterns that replicate themselves in future romantic relationships.

While attachment traumas run very deeply, every negative experience of a failed romantic relationship creates memories that trigger fear and rejection of intimacy. Fear acts as the shadow counterpart of intimate openness and mutual disclosure. We can see though an examination of the emotion of fear that love requires more of us than experiencing a pleasant experience, it requires us to know ourselves and the other person, it invites us to a journey of awareness and healing. It

is an experience of courage, care, commitment and intention to heal. “Love is a force that brings light to the deepest shadowy parts of ourselves. It brings to the surface the parts of us we desperately try to keep hidden” (Hendricks and Hendricks, 1990).

Conclusion

Love is a dynamic, subjective and intersubjective experience accompanied by a constellation of emotions that cause joy or suffering. Emotional awareness reveals the complexity of emotions and it helps us become more intentional about the quality of loving relationships we develop. Love can be experienced as a positive constellation of joy, intimacy and compassion that leads to happiness. The joy of falling in love floods our brain with happiness hormones, intimacy is the realization of love as an innate drive to connect and share our inner world, compassion is the ethical dimension of love as care and the desire to reduce the suffering of the other. I have also shown the dark side of love, analyzing its association with fear, shame and guilt, powerful emotions that structure love as an experience of suffering. Fear of intimacy creates a world of individual isolation where the other becomes an object of pleasure. Guilt and shame create co-dependent, unequal relationships in which compassion turns into compulsive, self-sacrificing caregiving. Emotional intelligence enables us to question the cultural institutions and the emotional patterns that make love painful, becoming more intentional in our experience of love that enhances and enriches life.

References

- Ahmed, Sara (2004) *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh: The University of Edinburgh Press
- Amodeo, John (2017) Are you codependent or just a caring person?
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/intimacy-path-towardspirituality/201711/are-you-codependent-or-just-caring-person> Retrieved Feb. 15 2020
- Batson, C.D. (1991) Empathic Joy and the empathy altruism hypothesis, *J. Pers.Soc. Psychology*, Sep.vol. 61(3): 413-26
- Bauman, Z. (2003) *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds*, Cambridge University Press
- Beck, Ulrich and Beck Gernsheim. Elisabeth (2002) *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences*, Sage Publications
- Ben-Ze'ev, Aaron and Goussinsky, Ruhana (2012) *In the Name of Love: Romantic Ideology and Its Victims*, Oxford Scholarship Online
- Borysenko, Joan (1990) *Guilt is the Teacher, Love is the Lesson*, Grand Central Publishing, Kindle ed.
- Bradshaw, John (2005) *Healing the Shame that Binds You*, Health Communications Inc.
- Butler, Judith (2004) *Undoing Gender*, Routledge
- Chapman, Gary (2015) *The Five Love Languages*, Northfield Publishing
- Cherlin, A.J. (1999) Going to extremes: family structure, children's well-being, and social science, *Demography*, Vol. 36(4):421-8
- Chodorow, Nancy (1999) *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, The University of California Press
- Eisler, Elaine (2012) *Sacred Pleasure: Sex, Myth and the Politics of The Body*, HarperOne, Kindle ed.
- Ekman, P. (2015). *Moving Toward Global Compassion*. San Francisco, CA: Ekman Group
- Ekman, Paul and Ekman, Eve (2017) Is Global compassion achievable? *The Oxford Handbook of Compassion Science*, Eds Ema, Sepalla et.al. p. 41-53
- Eran, J. (June 20, 2018) <http://www.supportiverelationships.org/home/relationship-problems-are-a-leading-cause-for-suicide/> Retrieved Feb. 24, 2020

- Feldman Barrett, Lisa (2017) *How Emotions Are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain*, Mariner Books
- Fisher HE, Brown LL, Aron A, Strong G, Mashek D. (2010) Reward, addiction, and emotion regulation systems associated with rejection in love, *Journal of Neurophysiology*, vol.104(1):51–60
- Fisher, H.E. (1994) *Anatomy of Love: A Natural History of Mating, Marriage, and Why We Stray*, Balantine Books
- Fromm, Erich (2013) *The Art of Loving*, Open Road Media
- Goetz, J. L., Keltner, D., & Simon-Thomas, E. (2010). Compassion: An evolutionary analysis and empirical review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 136(3), 351–374
- Gottman, John (2014) The Three Phases of Love <https://www.gottman.com/blog/the-3-phases-of-love/> Retrieved Feb. 20, 2020
- Gottman, John. (2000) *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, Harmony, Kindle ed.
- Giddens, Anthony (1993) *The Transformation of Intimacy- Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*, Stanford University Press
- Goleman, Daniel (2012) *Emotional Intelligence*, Bantam Books, kindle ed.
- Hatfield, E. & Rapson, R.L. (1993) *Love, sex and intimacy: Their psychology, Biology and History*, New York: Harper Collins.
- Hazan C.Shaver P. (1987) Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process, *Journal of Pers.Soc.Psychology*, March 52(3): 511-24
- Hendricks, Gay and Hendricks Kathlyn (1990) *Conscious Loving: The Journey to Co-Commitment*, Bantam Books, Kindle ed.
- Ilouz, Eva (2012) *Why Love Hurts*, Polity Press, Kindle Ed.
- Kauffman, P. Katherine (2020) Natural Spirituality and the Biology of Emotion, Redekop N. Vern and Redekop Gloria (eds.) *Awakening*, Lexington Books, 65-89
- Levine, Amir and Heller, Rachel (2012) *Attached: The New Science of Adult Attachment and How it Can Help you Find and Keep Love*, TarcherPerigree
- Lewis, Thomas; Amini, Fari; Lannon, Richard (2000) *A General Theory of Love*, Vintage Books

Lyubomirsky S. *The How of Happiness: A Scientific Approach to Getting the Life You Want*. New York: Penguin Press; 2008

Perel, Esther (2018) <https://estherperel.com/blog/7-verbs> Retrieved Dec. 2 2019

Perel, Esther (2009) *Mating in Captivity: Unlocking Erotic Intelligence*, HarperCollins e-books

Poole-Heller, Diane (2019) *The Power of Attachment*, Sounds True Publishing

Rich, Adrienne (1976) *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Norton Press

Rossi, Alice S. (1985) *Gender and the Life Course*, New York, Routledge

Seligman, E.P. Martin (2012) *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being*, Atria Books

Stein, Steven and Book, Howard (2011) *Emotional Intelligence and Your Success*, Jossey-Bass

Tatkin, Stan (2012) *Wired for Love*, New Harbinger Publications, Kindle ed.

Tennov, Dorothy (1998) *Love and Limerence-The Experience of Being in Love*, Scarborough Press

Thich nhat hanh (2015) Why Doesn't Buddhism support romantic love? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FCIIDmN_Po

Zeidner, Moshe and Kaluda, Iris (2008) Romantic love: what's emotional intelligence got to do with it? *Journal of Personality and Individual Differences*. Vol.44(8):1684-1695.