Standing in Love: Unpacking and Unlocking the Supreme Emotion

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Standing in Love: Unpacking and Unlocking the Supreme Emotion

Abstract
Love is all around us. It flows through every aspect of our lives and has inspired legions of people to talk, write, paint, act, and fight for it. Moreover, love affects our biological, mental, and physical states of being. A lack of love in one's life can have disastrous effects while an abundance of love can produce life-enhancing rewards. Positive psychology is the study of what makes life worth living and the strengths and virtues that enable people to live within optimal ranges of human functioning. Through a positive psychology lens and a review of the current literature, this capstone is an exploration into the contextual and biological implications of love, why it is a key component into what makes life worth living, and how people can learn to cultivate more love in their lives through empirically-tested activities and exercises.

Keywords
Love, Connection, Positive Emotions, Positive Psychology, Oxytocin

Disciplines
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Standing in Love:
Unpacking and Unlocking the Supreme Emotion

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A Capstone Project Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Applied Positive Psychology

Advisor: Karen Warner
September 30, 2014
STANDING IN LOVE

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Acknowledgments

Human beings are complex and our relationships are all the more messy. There are lulls between conversations, swelling insecurities, and awkward interstices. There is transformational chaos, conflict, and tragedy. But there is also undeniable chemistry and uncontrollable laughter, there are electrical currents that pass through us with a single touch, breathtaking acts of courage, hours of unabiding conversation, outpourings of the deepest vulnerabilities, and souls that make us come alive as if for the first time. Sometimes we don’t know what to say or how to say it but the mere fact that we are saying anything at all makes saying it all the more beautiful. This is my attempt to say “anything at all” to the people who have shown me, through their unconditional support, that love is something worth fighting for and it is, indeed, at the bedrock of all positive emotions, the most important thing in life.

First and foremost, I want to thank my MAPP family and tribe for your brilliance, strength, compassion, and wholeheartedness. I have never met such a large group of people whose bursting hearts have the capacity to fill rooms (on a consistent basis!) with tears of joy, laughter, and inspiration.

• To Anne, thank you for being my guardian angel and playing with me every onsite, you truly are Wonder Woman.

• To Patricia, thank you so much for opening your heart and your home to me throughout the year. If there is ever a person I would like to be when I grow up, it is you.

• To Laura, thank you for being my MAPP roommate and scheming to bring new wacky characters out of me.
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• To Nico, thank you for your friendship, patience while I talked your ear off, and endless hours of free coaching—I can finally raise my hand in class without going into anaphylactic shock.

• To Esa Saarinen for showing me that we can choose to live in an elevated state of being and bring others with us for the ride.

To Raquel, I give thanks every day that you entered into my life so serendipitously just a few years ago. From the moment we met, I knew we had been long lost sisters and our relationship only grows stronger every year. Thank you for believing in me and loving me without question and seeing a spark in me when I feel that I have lost it (#SoulSisters).

To Diana, thank you for bringing a little bit of home to Philadelphia, for challenging me to think more precisely and concisely, and for being the ying to my yang.

To Karen Warner—my wonderful advisor without whom this capstone would definitely not have been completed. Thank you for your endless words of wisdom, thank you for believing in me, thank you for picking me up when I fell down, and thank you for your kindness and patience. At the end of the year I had said to the class that I truly believed that words have the capacity to change worlds. You, Karen, changed my world for the better this summer with your heartfelt words. I am forever grateful to you.

And last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my mom and dad. If I were ever at a loss for words, now would be the time. They have taught and shown me everything I know about love and they exemplify it every day. Papi, thank you for our 6:00 AM walks of talking inspiration. You are my living Buddha. You always know where to find and shine a light when I can only see darkness. And finally, Mami, I don’t say it often enough but I adore you and I thank you for always being there for me—and I mean always. I don’t understand a world without you.
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Introduction

*We've got this gift of love, but love is like a precious plant. You can't just accept it and leave it in the cupboard or just think it's going to get on by itself. You've got to keep watering it. You've got to really look after it and nurture it.*

--John Lennon

Love. No topic has been more talked about, written about, fantasized about, or fought about than love (Fisher, 2006). From the moment we are born till the moment we die, whether we are consciously aware of it or not, our lives elusively, inexorably, and improbably revolve around love (Lewis, Amini, & Lannon, 2007). This is no surprise. All we need to do is look around at the world we live in today. Across generations and cultures, we spend hours watching romantic comedies and reading tragic love stories; we listen to all sorts of songs about love; and we spend thousands of dollars on jewelry, gifts, and adornments, all in the name of love. Indeed, love is the answer to the problem of human existence, allowing us to achieve interpersonal union and fully connect with another person or community (Fromm, 1956). It is also the life source that determines our thoughts, emotions, moods, brain, body functioning, identities, and relationships (Buss, 1994; Lewis, Amini, & Lannon, 2007; Fredrickson, 2013; Fisher, 2006). Given all that, it is not a stretch to assert that love determines who we are and who we are going to be. But if love is so central to our existence, why is it that we are not jumping to our feet demanding that we learn what it means to love?

In his book, *The Art of Loving*, Erich Fromm (1956) made a beautiful distinction between *falling* in love and *standing* in love. The initial excitement born out of instant connection, sudden intimacy, and intense infatuation is often misconstrued for love. But the relationships (romantic, platonic, professional, or familial) that weather the turbulent storms of mutual disappointment, boredom, or antagonism are those that *stand* to master the art of love. Mastering the art of love
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can be looked at the same way as mastering any other art, such as music, painting, writing, mathematics, medicine, or engineering. It takes a spark of fervent zeal followed by equally fervent tenacity. If a girl desires to become a dancer her first step would not be dancing on a professional stage in front of a live audience. She would first study the art of dancing, attend dancing lessons, hire a dance coach, lose herself in the act of dancing, and spend years practicing the art of dance until she became an expert at it. The same can be said for our desire to want to live and know love. Believing that we know the intricacies of love does not mean we will inherently become experts in it. Love is something to be experienced, as it is something to be learned. We have to get deep into it and live it rather than fantasize about it and leave it to whimsical and magical thinking (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008). While we all have the capacity to love, it takes effort, a keen eye, action, and an opening of the heart to others in order to cultivate the conditions for love to exist (Fredrickson, 2013a).

As we will come to learn, many of the practices and exercises that seed and cultivate love are centered around other people, but the person who will be the most changed is the individual who centers and focuses on opening herself up to love (Fredrickson, 2013a). By increasing the well-being of others we can expand our own levels of happiness in the future (Fowler & Christakis, 2008). While we may live within the confines of the solitary mind, our souls thrive with connection. Life becomes worth living when we have close relationships that are strengthened over periods of time (Gable & Gosnell, 2011). It’s when we sit on our grandfather’s lap to listen to repeated stories after we have already grown up. It’s when we rush to the market after a long day of work to grab hot soup for a sick friend in need. It’s helping a struggling classmate understand the material days before an exam. It’s the faith that we can call someone in the middle of night sobbing and they will answer the phone, no matter the inconvenience. The
lingering joy that we receive in these moments of altruism might seem personal and private but we must not forget that they are born from the intimate connections we nurture (Vaillant, 2008).

Thus, the key to bringing more love into our lives is contingent upon the strength of our collective social network. In fact, a more nuanced look at the patterns of love, kindness, social connection, and even success has shown that givers, people who give without expecting anything in return, are more likely to land at the top of the success ladder in virtually every occupation (Grant, 2013). Paying attention to the needs of others, acting in their interests against our own, providing help, or sharing ideas and connections can be extremely powerful in achieving individual success, enhancing the success of those around us, and creating more love in our lives (Grant, 2013; Fredrickson, 2013a).

Still, love is a difficult topic to work with, leaving people confused about what the word means both conceptually and in their lives. Just the other day I asked a group of friends two questions on love: (1) what does love mean to you; (2) and how do you love? Upon really thinking about the subject, they were left dumbfounded and perplexed. Truth be told, they just didn’t know. This doesn’t come as a surprise. When were we ever taught about love? And where can we look to learn the mastery of love?

Thus, the purpose of my capstone is to uncover the dynamics that allow people to establish and maintain meaningful connections with one another so as to create possible interventions that allow love to enter into our hearts, homes, and environments. Underlying this exploration is the premise that love is less fate, more decision; less an accident than a meaningful practice. For the purposes of the paper I will discuss: (1) what love is, (2) why love is important, (3) the evolutionary and biological components of love, (4) and how love can be cultivated and practiced.
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What is Love?

*Love means the body, the soul, the life, the entire being. We feel love as we feel the warmth of our blood, we breathe love as we breathe air, we hold it in ourselves as we hold our thoughts. Nothing more exists for us.*

--Guy de Maupassant

What is love? Love means different things to different people (Sternberg & Barnes, 1988). Understanding, coming up with, and embracing a conceptual definition of love has been excruciatingly difficult for the academic community (Lewis, Amini, & Lannon, 2007; Berscheid, 2006; Vaillant, 2008, Fredrickson, 2013a). As such, this task was traditionally left to the arts—literature, song, dance, poetry, religion, painting, sculpture—and vastly ignored by the scientific community. In 1970, Abraham Maslow (1970) argued, “It’s amazing how little the empirical sciences have to offer on the subject of love. Particularly strange is the silence of psychologists, for one might think this to be their particular obligation” (p.181). It wasn’t until recently that psychologists began to offer empirical evidence on the subject of love. And even to this day new theories of love emerge, old ones are modified, and some have been completely discarded (Weis, 2006).

If we turn to the dictionary (dictionary.reference.com, n.d), there will be an emphasis on romantic love, defining “love” as:

- A profoundly tender, passionate affection for another person;
- A feeling of warm personal attachment or deep affection, as a parent, child, or friend;
- Sexual passion or desire;
- A person toward whom love is felt; beloved person; sweetheart;
- An intensely amorous incident; amour
If we look to another dictionary, the definitions don’t give us any new insight with which we can guide our lives. According to Oxford Dictionaries (oxforddictionaries.com, n.d.) “love” is defined as:

- An intense feeling of deep affection;
- A deep romantic or sexual attachment to someone;
- A great interest and pleasure in something;

While these definitions describe by-products of love, I would argue that they do not sufficiently illustrate love’s true meaning. In fact these definitions leave us more confused about love than on the onset, predominantly attributing love to romantic constructs and passionate waves. As it seems there is no universal definition for love, however, it is undoubtedly a real emotion that expands, and is expressed, across all cultures.

**Positive Emotions**

Barbara Fredrickson, currently seen as the foremost scholar on positive emotions, has been investigating the science of positive affective states for over two decades (Seligman, 2011). Positive affective states are also known as the positive emotions that feel good and allow people to live within an optimal range of functioning (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). Her research has led to the identification of pleasing states, their unique effects, and why they are central to human nature. Positive emotions include: love, joy, amusement, gratitude, awe, interest, inspiration, contentment, hope, faith, forgiveness, and compassion, and the like (Fredrickson, 2009; Vaillant, 2008). This is fantastic news given that the psychological literature on positive emotions has been scant over the years, with theorists primarily favoring negative emotions and neglecting positive emotions (Fredrickson, 1998).
Traditional theoretical models on emotions contend that emotions such as anger, fear or disgust function to narrow a person’s thought-action repertoire by triggering specific action tendencies (Fredrickson, 1998). For instance, feeling anxiety or fear acts as an impetus to escape or avoid, feeling anger as an impetus to attack, disgust as an impetus to expel, and so on. On the other hand, when used appropriately, negative emotions can act as the symptoms to problems within which positivity can provide the cure. The tinge of disaffection with a job is an indicator to switch to a more meaningful career. The guilt of wrongdoing a loved one is a catalyst to acting with compassion and asking for forgiveness. The mark of a painful year creates a signpost to head in a different direction. From an evolutionary standpoint, negative emotions carry a lot of weight in adaptive mechanisms. They shoot out warning signals that something is going wrong and propel people to fight, flee, or spit—ultimately protecting and saving us from dire circumstances (Fredrickson, 2013b).

Acting as a counterweight, Fredrickson’s (2004) broaden-and-build model maintains that positive emotions give fuel to life. Rather than narrowing a person’s scope and producing specific thought-action tendencies, positive emotions broaden a person’s idea about possible actions and futures, making thought patterns more flexible, integrative, and efficient (Isen, Rosenzweig, & Young, 1991; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; Vaillant, 2008). They open hearts, solidify strengths, build good mental habits, support physical health, expand social connections, broaden horizons and possibilities, and enhance creativity. In a meta-analysis of over 250 different scientific studies on positivity, which collectively tested over 275,000 people over time, researchers concluded that positive affect predicted, produced and reflected success (financial, social, or physical) in life (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005).
According to Fredrickson (2009) positive emotions are the single most important factor in a flourishing life. Not to say that there are not other essential ingredients, such as, positive character, positive cognitions, positive relationships, and meaning and purpose that largely contribute to a vibrant life. However, positive emotions, if fully cultivated and given their rightful importance, may just be the most important enablers of human flourishing (Fredrickson, 2006). At the seat of all positive emotions, lies love (Fredrickson, 2009).

**Love As A Practice**

Fredrickson (2013a) defines love as connection. Love is the supreme emotion that occurs when two people share one or more positive emotions; when there is synchronicity between the behaviors and biochemical processes of the two people; and when there is a motivation to invest in each other’s well-being in a way that brings about mutual care and growth. Love is not just one emotion, it is a fusion of all other positive emotions. It triggers other positive emotions, like interest, contentment and joy while broadening our ability to build and strengthen social attachments (Fredrickson, 1998). It is comprised of moments of shared joy and authentic interest. According to Fredrickson, “love is the micro-moment of warmth and connection that you share with another living being” (Fredrickson, 2013, p. 10).

In his Paphos seminar Esa Saarinen (2012) alludes to the importance of micro-moments as a way of elevating our daily experiences to instances of love and connection. He remarks, “There is no way one can predict the effects that a subtle change in one’s attunement to one’s life can bring about” (p. 20). Once a person begins to have an elevated reflection upon her overall orientation in life then micro-behavioral changes will ensue. It is these small micro-changes that will have large impacts on the quality of our lives and our relationships (E. Saarinen, personal communication, December 7, 2013). While what happens outside the self is out of our control,
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upon elevated reflection we can design systems within ourselves that help us reach desired states and better lives (Saarinen, 2008). According to Saarinen (2012) elevation is, “the action or fact of elevating or being elevated, the augmentation of or increase in the amount or level of something, the height above a given level” (p. 3). When we engage in elevated reflection micro-
changes are initiated, yielding breakthroughs in elevated emotions such as love, compassion, inspiration, and joy. This needs to occur in the home, we need to be astutely aware and mindful of not only what we say but of the non-verbal non-directed messages we give off.

Why Love is Important

*One word frees us of all the weight and pain of life; that word is love.*

--Sophocles

Love permeates all facets of our objective and subjective realities. It takes a front seat in literature, film, music, poetry, theatre, and any other art form. As Helen Fisher (2006) writes, “Everywhere people sing for love, pray for love, work for love, live for love, kill for love, and die for love” (p.107). In a worldwide cross-cultural study of thirty-seven societies from six continents and five islands, both men and women ranked love, or mutual attraction, as the most valued quality when choosing a partner (Buss, 2006). Research has further shed light on the importance of strong, positive, and loving relationships in life. In a study that investigated very happy people and the factors that seemed most likely to contribute to high happiness, Ed Diener and Martin Seligman (2002) found that very happy people have rich fulfilling social and interpersonal relationships and stronger romantic relationships as opposed to less happy groups. In contrast, the absence of love produces harmful consequences, such as isolation, inhibition, inauthenticity, and psychopathology (Linares, 2006).
Our happiness depends on love. In fact, after conducting the 72-year longitudinal Harvard Grant Study of Adult Development, a project focused on investigating the mental and physical well-being of 268 Harvard undergraduate males throughout their lifetime to determine what the secrets that largely contribute to human flourishing are, George Vaillant (2012), the study’s long-time director, concluded, “Happiness is love, full stop.” Here we are not necessarily talking about romantic love; but finding love in life unlocks and facilitates intimacy, happiness, resilience and even financial success. To Vaillant (2012), happiness means being surrounded by people that you love and allowing them to love you in return.

At the start of a class lecture, Chris Feudtner a pediatrician at the Children’s Hospital of Pennsylvania who focuses on improving the lives of children with complex chronic conditions, opened the talk this way: “What’s love got to do with it? Everything.” (C. Feudtner, personal communication, January 10, 2014). You have to enter your life with love. You have to love your job, your clients, and yourself and you have to love when you are in the middle of it. Believing that you love in retrospect or in preparation for any given situation, while worthwhile, is not enough when faced with trying moments. Coming in with love sets the stage for openness, trust, good decision-making, positive collaboration, and connection. You can work backwards from love, but you have to start with it. Love is the primary emotion that the body needs and craves (Fredrickson, 2013a). It creates life-enhancing, thriving, and optimal conditions within the body that stimulate well-being, happiness, health, citizenship, fulfillment, integrity, and other virtues for their own right.
The Biology of Love

The body is designed for love (Fredrickson, 2013a). So far, we have defined what love is from an emotional perspective. Let’s explore its evolution and biochemistry. Love is a biological and adaptive phenomenon (Carter & Porges, 2012; Buss, 2006). According to Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon (2007), distinguished psychiatry professors at the University of California-San Francisco School of Medicine, the nature of love can be discovered through the scientific exploration of the brain. In writing their book A General Theory of Love, the authors set out to answer the following questions: “What is love and why are some people unable to find it? What is loneliness, and why does it hurt? What are relationships and how and why do they work the way they do” (p.vii). The book is a convergence of poetic art intermixed with psychobiology, for it is almost impossible to delve into the secrets of the heart without the emotional potency offered by the arts. With this in mind, they begin their exploration with a poem and a claim that because the neural systems responsible for emotion and intellect are divided within the brain, humans constantly struggle with an internal antagonism between emotion and reason. As Blaise Pascal once stated, “the heart has its reasons whereof reason knows nothing” (p.viii). However, as Martin Luther King (1963) claimed, it is often the creative synthesis of a tender heart fusing with a sharp mind that will bring about wisdom and harmony.

Evolutionary Perspective

While the nature of love is difficult to define, it has an intrinsic order governed by the physical laws of the universe (Lewis et al., 2007). First and foremost, as it seems, love is irreducible. It is a dynamic, multi-dimensional, and bi-directional biological process that triggers cognitive and physiological processes that influence emotional and mental states, which then affect how people interact with one another (Carter & Porges, 2012). Because this is a recurring
phenomenon, love is neither a one-off occurrence nor does it just happen; it requires constant maintenance and feedback through sensory and cognitive systems. This further bolsters the argument that love is not something to fall into. It is an active and conscious activity, and more importantly it is an attitude. William James (1899/1983) contended that emotions are derived by external stimuli that evoke physical reactions. This means that while we may think that emotions have control over us, it is in fact the other way around, we have control over our emotions depending on how we interpret external stimuli. Thus emotions, such as love, can be regulated through direct actions and deliberate choices that over time turn into habits.

In order to understand the biological phenomenon of love, we have to take into account evolutionary history. As Theodosius Dobzhansky (1973) wrote, “Nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of evolution” (p. 1). Over 150 years ago Charles Darwin detailed the “struggle for existence” in his iconoclastic book The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection (1859/1958). After years of research, he famously wrote of our inevitable need for competition to evolve as a species. For Darwin, man was inherently selfish and driven to select those activities that ensured survival (Darwin, 1859/1958). These conclusions paved the way for many of the individualistic viewpoints held in modern day society. We see examples of groups of people living out the Darwinian quest to be the “fittest” everyday. From the single-minded medical student striving to take whatever steps are necessary to achieve an end; to social structures that celebrate fierce competition, disregarding the needs of the larger group. Yet, Darwin also identified a fundamental problem with selfishness in the context of adaptive social groups. He noted that while selfish individuals might out-compete altruists within a group, it was the internally altruistic groups that would out-compete the selfish groups (Wilson & Wilson, 2007).
In fact, life on earth—from primitive invertebrates, to prokaryotes, to bees, and ultimately to humans—is inherently social (Carter & Porges, 2012). Living organisms have the ability to work collaboratively to support homeostasis, growth, and reproduction (Ingham & Jacob, 2008). Prokaryotic cells (bacteria), for instance, specifically interact with their own kind to form “supercolonies” so as to move rapidly over surfaces, reproduce more effectively, and acquire chemical properties and capabilities that are far more complex than that of the individual cell (Ingham & Jacob, 2008). At this point, cells are not competing with one another; instead they have a collective intelligence that accelerates adaptation and turns them into cohesive superorganisms (Haidt, 2012). A superorganism is an organism made out of many other organisms.

Another evolutionary example that displays our inherent capacity to be ultra-social, meaning that we live in large groups with an internal system allowing us to benefit from the division of labor, is the idea of eusociality (Woodard et al., 2011). Eusociality is a term that is primarily attributed to insects such as wasps, ants, and beehives due to their striking ability to live in colonies containing thousands of highly specialized workers that are produced by one or a few queens. Here, the female offspring surrender personal reproduction to care for their siblings, which in turn accelerates reproduction. While this does not occur with human beings, we did inherit the social behaviors of these particular insects, whereupon we learned that in order to survive we needed to form cooperative groups that protect each other in the face of predators (Richerson & Boyde, 1998; Holldobler & Wilson, 2009).

As we can see, being part of a group that fosters altruism, trust, equality, and collective binding not only allows us to thrive and find meaning in our lives, but it is also an inherent adaptive trait (Haidt, 2012). We descended from a long line of socially adaptive groups, in which
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altruistic groups, those that work together cooperatively, would out-compete the selfish groups (Wilson & Wilson, 2007). According to Jonathan Haidt (2012) our ancestors could selectively enter into a “one for all, all for one” mindset, thereby identifying with the group and advancing its greater interests. In doing so, a “butterfly effect” (the phenomenon whereby a minor change in circumstances can cause a large change in outcome) occurs both for the group and the individuals within it. Working and playing in synchronicity brings meaning to life, opens the doors to acceptance and interdependence, and stimulates a collective effervescence of emotions, whereupon energies, passions, and sensations become all the more vigorous. As Haidt (2013) notes, there is a dual nature to happiness (which, for the purposes of this paper I am equating to love, as they are one in the same). It comes from between: the relationship between us and our friends, us and our work, and us and something larger than ourselves. Yes, we are designed to help ourselves but we are also programmed to be part of a larger whole.

Biological Perspective

What might this theoretical alternative reveal about human love? We have surely come a long way from insects and bees. Yet their evolutionary pathways paved the way for the mammalian species to inherit social mechanisms that would allow for the development of reciprocal and selective long-lasting relationships into adulthood (Carter & Porges, 2012). If sociability lives within our cells, where might love reside? In none other than the world’s most lucrative treasure chest: the brain.

The brain is made up of a network of neurons, the individual cells that make up the nervous system, that communicate with each other through cell-to-cell signaling both electronically and chemically (Lewis et al., 2007). The molecules that send chemical messages to the brain are neurotransmitters, which in turn produce chemical reactions that alter our minds.
For instance, drinking coffee enhances alertness while alcohol breaks down inhibitions—all by triggering these signals. Thus, any stimulus that mimics or blocks these neurotransmitters can alter particular states of mind, such as memory, thought, pain, consciousness, and even love. This constant signaling is very important to our survival because our cells process information from the environment, which produces action, thereby changing behavior. However, we are so much more than a signaling of neurotransmitters automatically reacting to external stimuli.

The human brain has three different centers that house the origins of love—the reptilian brain, the limbic brain, and the neocortical brain (Lewis et al., 2007; Carter & Porges, 2012). The most primitive and instinctive center of the brain is the reptilian brain. It is a bulbous extension of the spinal cord responsible for autonomic functioning, such as heart rate, breathing, swallowing, muscle reflexes, visual tracking, and so on (Vaillant, 2008). When stimulated, neurons are triggered to primitively and selfishly respond, creating our fight, fright, feed, and fornication instincts. However, because this is the emotional core of the human nervous system, it is also responsible for the origin of love (Carter & Porges, 2012). Functional MRI (fMRI) studies indicate that when the brain is “in love,” it is flooded with soothing sensations that slows the racing heart, triggering a calm-and-connect response (Fisher, 2006; Carter & Porges, 2012; Fredrickson, 2013a). These responses are regulated by the vagus nerve, the tenth cranial nerve that emerges from the brain stem and connects the brain to the heart and other essential systems (Porges, 2007). Cardiac vagal tone, that is, the variability of heart rate associated with respiratory patterns, indicates how well the vagus nerve is working. High vagal tone (slow heart rate with deep breathing) is associated with physical health, superior abilities to regulate emotions, prosocial behavior, and the biological aptitude for love, whereas low vagal tone (high heart rate with shallow breathing) forecasts greater risk for heart disease, isolation, and disconnectedness.
Further, the vagus nerve is anatomically linked to coordinating eye gaze, facial expressions, and listening—all of which are critical functions for positive social connections and social connectedness (Fabes, Eisenberg, & Eisenbud, 1993; Kok & Fredrickson, 2010). Fortunately, research has shown that vagal tone works like a muscle. By practicing emotional exercises, such as loving-kindness meditation, people can increase their vagal tone thereby increasing their capacity to experience love, compassion, and goodwill, which in turn build physical health (Kok et al., 2013).

The limbic brain, present in all mammals, houses more anatomical structures (hippocampus, fornix, amygdale, septum, cingulated gyrus, perirhinal, and perhipocampal) that give rise and mediate positive and negative emotions, mammalian interaction and nurturing, caretaking, vocal communication (i.e., singing, yowling, crying), and play (Lewis et al., 2007). The limbic brain is present in all mammals such as dogs, cats, monkeys, and the like. This is why you see a mother lion nurture, protect, and risk her life for her baby cub. Mammals are also known for their playfulness and their innate joy, within which they frolic, tumble, roughhouse, and cuddle with one another and with us. Essentially the limbic brain is the part of the brain that provides human connection, desire, and other sensory emotions (Vaillant, 2008).

Finally, the neocortical brain (neocortex) is the largest part of the human brain and warehouse of mystery and wonder (Lewis et al., 2007). It is responsible for speaking, writing, reasoning, self-control, conscious motor control, conscious awareness, and abstraction (symbolic representation, visualizing, strategy, planning, and problem-solving). The neocortex, working collaborative with the limbic brain, allows us to regulate, synthesize, and integrate emotions and give meaning to them. It is the most evolved part of the brain, and it has generated science, culture, ideas, beliefs, and religions (Vaillant, 2008).
As previously mentioned, love is a highly complex neurochemical process that involves extensive neural networks working in unison throughout the changing lifespan. However, there are several elements that consistently emerge in discussions of the biochemistry of love (Carter & Porges, 2012). Here we explore the role of the neuropeptide, oxytocin; the so-called mind-body connection; and the role of mindfulness.

**The Cuddle Hormone: Oxytocin.** Oxytocin—frequently described as the “cuddle hormone” or the “love hormone”—plays a central role in reproduction, attachment, social bonding, and love (Carter & Porges, 2012; Fredrickson, 2013). While oxytocin is not the molecular equivalent to love, it is a vital component of the nervous system in that it modulates functioning of the hypothalamic, pituitary, and adrenal axis, which have been shown to regulate a number of social processes, such as trust, reciprocity, cooperation, attraction, stress regulation, conflict resolution, kindness, and connection (Barraza et al., 2013). Further, other hormones and environmental factors regulate oxytocin’s cellular receptors (Carter & Porges, 2012). Depending on our experiences of love over time, our receptors can adapt to those experiences. Below is a summary of the current research on the effect that oxytocin has on our life experiences and capacity to love and be loved. Oxytocin plays a key role in:

- Social Interaction & Bonding: When oxytocin and vasopressin (a related neuropeptide) were centrally administered in opposite sex prairie voles, research showed that the animals exhibited more physical contact (spent more time touching, cuddling, and resting side by side), social contact, and the formation of partner preferences resulting in monogamous relationships (Cho, DeVries, Williams, & Carter, 1999). As such, oxytocin permits animals to overcome avoidant behaviors and stimulates approach behavior.
• Increasing Trusting Relationships: Intranasal administration of oxytocin in humans causes a substantial increase in trust and reciprocity among humans (Kosfeld, Heinrichs, Zak, Fischbacher, & Fehr, 2005). This means that when higher levels of oxytocin are present in the brain, people are more likely to trust others thereby increasing the propensity for mutual cooperation, altruism, giving, and confidential information (Mikolajczak, Pinon, Lane, Timary, & Luminet, 2010).

• Sharing Secrets with a Stranger: A study that asked sixty volunteer participants to share personal secrets with a stranger showed that when the participants did share personal information, which required both trust and trustworthiness, natural levels of oxytocin increased in the brain (Kéri & Kiss, 2011). This increase raises propensity to further trust people to safeguard and protect our interests.

• Heightening Attunement to Social Cues: Intranasal administration of oxytocin has been shown to enhance identification of positive facial expressions, like smiling and softly gazing at another’s eyes (Campell, 2010). People are also more likely to become attuned to recognizing positive words in their environment—such as “love,” “appreciation,” “gratitude,” “compassion,” “kissing,” etc.

• Reducing Fear: Functional MRI imaging has demonstrated that when oxytocin is administered under stress-inducing situations, the amount of cortisol running through a person’s body would decrease, thereby enabling the person to behave more calmly and positively—as opposed to behaving with anxiety (Campell, 2010).
The Mind-Body Connection. While love lives in the brain, it courses through our veins and is expressed through the heart. There is no doubt that the human mind is exquisitely fascinating. As psychologists, we become so entranced with the wondrous functions of the brain and our abilities to creatively express its intricacies, that we oftentimes neglect the basic instrument that houses the human spirit—the body (Shusterman, 2006). In fact, part of mastering the art and practice of love requires understanding the woven connection between humanistic, cognitive, health, and biological sciences. An interdisciplinary field called somaesthetics seeks to study these connections by recognizing that the body, mind, and culture are deeply codependent and should be examined as an integrated unit. As Richard Shusterman (2006) explains, the mental and somatic lives operate in tandem. Everything we think or feel is experienced through the body and in turn our bodies are affected by our cognitive and emotional stirrings. This union is called the mind-body connection. Traditionally, the sciences have rejected the importance and role of the body in achieving our intellectual and moral goals. Understanding that the body is from which and through which we perceive and express love will guide us towards the happiness we seek.

Mutrie and Faulkner (2004) further explore the mind-body connection by highlighting the somatopsychic principle that a healthy mind dwells in a healthy body. They argue that there is significant evidence that shows a positive link between eating well, habitual physical activity and well-being. Exercises that increase our physical strength, for instance, propel us to feel more self-confident in our ability to perform tasks and achieve goals, thereby positively influencing our self-esteem. Not only does physical activity protect our physiological and psychological functioning by reducing the risk of heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, colon cancer,
weight gain, depression, and anxiety but it also promotes and enhances our mood, affect, self-esteem, sleep, and cognitive functioning.

The Role of Mindfulness. Meditative exercises that cultivate mindfulness (the state of consciously placing attention to the present reality) have been shown to enhance awareness, attention, positive emotions, and social connectedness (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008). Mindfulness has been connected to our ability to perceive emotions in ourselves, to use emotions to redirect our thoughts, to understand our emotions and emotional language, and to manage our emotions in a productive and positive way (Brown & Ryan, 2004; Salovey, Caruso, & Mayer, 2004). By cultivating mindfulness we can learn, through habitual practice, to become more attuned to internal and external cues. This can sharpen emotional intelligence skills, enhance self-knowledge, and spur action that is aligned with the self.

When we act in accordance with the self, we tend to behave autonomously, which promotes well-being (Brown & Ryan, 2004). In all, our bodies become healthier when we constantly nourish them with positive social connections and physical and mental exercises that occur every day in small micro-moments. By being mindful and listening not only to others but also to our own inner thoughts, feelings, and bodily cues, we can begin to tune into the love that resides within us. As Erick Fromm summarized (1956):

If you love yourself, you love everybody else as you do yourself. As long as you love another person less than you love yourself, you will not really succeed in loving yourself; but if you love all alike, including yourself, you will love them as one person…Thus he is a great and righteous person who, loving himself, loves all others equally (p. 58).
So, while we know that evolutionary biology tells us that it is within our best interest to care for the welfare of the group at the slight expense of our individual interests; and psychology tells us that to love ourselves is the first step to loving others, the next question that arises is: how? How might we begin to reconcile our natural tendency to care only for ourselves with the idea that building thriving social communities will elicit far greater outcroppings of love, positivity, joy, and well-being?

In the next section, we explore the pathways to mindfully building upon our practice of love.

**How: Pathways to Love & Connection**

*Love is not something you feel, it is something you do.*

--David Wilkerson

It is the premise of this paper that love is a habit, an art to be mastered, and the emotion that we should place our attention on. I also believe that carefully designed and intentional interventions can allow us to attain, and be more receptive to, love.

Over 120 years ago, William James (1892/1984) made the assertion that the greatest thing people can ever learn to do is make the nervous system their ally by automating and habituating as many useful actions in order to potentiate attentional capabilities. According to James, habits have a physiological basis; they are new pathways discharged through the nerve-centers when a task is routinely performed. And when diligently and continuously practiced they simplify movements, make them more accurate, reduce fatigue, and save time and energy when performing any type of act. Therefore, the process of learning the art of love is far from passive.
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It takes care, knowledge, concentration, responsibility, discipline, and practice until the mind and body begin to work in tandem in such a way that love becomes a state of being.

Happiness, or well-being, has often been thought of as reserved for those who have a natural disposition to it, or as William James (1902/1985) would describe them, people with “souls of sky-blue tint” (p. 73). But what about those “sick-souls” whose low pain threshold sends them over the edge? For them, is happiness—is love—simply elusive?

This section explores the contributions of the field of Positive Psychology, with its attendant bias toward positive emotion and positive action in the form of “positive interventions,” to help us answer this question. Below we will explore various positive interventions (PPIs) that have been found to contribute strongly to the mindful creation and practice of love, which can help us create more meaningful relationships in the future.

Positive Psychology

*Positive psychology* is defined as the science and study of what is going right in the world and what makes life worth living (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The field seeks to identify the strengths of character and positive experiences that enable people to reach their full potential and thrive within the context of everyday life. In contrast to mainstream psychology, the goal of positive psychology is to increase flourishing, well-being, happiness, and the like (Peterson, 2006). Specifically, positive psychology seeks to investigate the following topics: positive subjective experiences, positive individual traits, and institutions that enable positive experiences and positive traits (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

As we have established, social connection—a key determinant to positive close relationships and micro-moments of love—is a primary psychological need and fundamental human motivator that is essential to a wide range of physical and psychological health benefits.
And yet, research suggests that social connection is decreasing while loneliness is increasing in American society (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Hobbs & Stoops, 2002; Lee & Robbins 1995). Consequently, the lack of social connection (loneliness) represents one of the leading causes for people to seek therapy and counseling (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). As such, traditional psychological research has focused on uncovering poor-quality relationship processes and their outcomes (Gable & Gosnell, 2011). Traditionally, psychology has devoted the majority of its attention on the disease model in order to understand, treat, and prevent human pathologies and psychological disorders (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The primary goal of traditional psychology centered around alleviating mental suffering, such as pain, depression, anxiety, hostility, eating disorders, obsessive disorders, schizophrenia, etc. The study of well-being, on the other hand, was considered fuzzy, soft, unscientific, and elusive (Lyubomirsky, 2007). Research has shown that the mere absence of disease or negative emotions does not guarantee optimal well-being or happiness (Pawelski, 2013; Fredrickson, 2009).

In 1998, however, the focus began to shift to identifying human strengths and the behaviors that cultivate them when Martin Seligman was appointed as president of the American Psychological Association (Seligman, 2002). In his presidential address Seligman made a call for researchers to focus on the factors that promote well-being rather than just concentrating on correcting the damages of psychopathology (Rusk & Waters, 2013). The field intends to complement rather than replace traditional psychology. It fully recognizes the importance of studying mental illness, but it also insists that studying strengths is just as important as studying weaknesses. Since its inception, the field of positive psychology has grown rapidly.

As positive psychology and the study of well-being have emerged, so has empirical research on the processes that promote high quality relationships and their link to generating
well-being. For example, a recent study on well-being done by psychologist Matthias Mehl and colleagues (2010) showed that people who have more substantive vis-à-vis conversations are happier and more connected. The research demonstrated that higher well-being is associated with less time spent alone, more social interactions, and having profoundly meaningful conversations as opposed to small talk.

According to Seligman (2011), there are five elements that contribute to human flourishing and well-being: positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishments (PERMA). By using strict scientific standards (using the scientific method, testing theories against evidence, etc.) to look at the components that make up a satisfying life, researchers have advanced this idea by developing empirically grounded interventions that promote the principles of positive psychology (i.e., positive interventions) (Pawelski, n.d).

What distinguishes positive psychology from the positive thinking movement or self-help—and what establishes it as a pathway to living and knowing love as this paper has defined it—is its emphasis on empirical research to understand people, their emotions, how they lead their lives, and what allows them to thrive; whereas, self-help is predominately characterized by self-proclaimed gurus that have strong intuitions about what is going right in the world, based on their personal and professional experiences (J. O. Pawelski, personal communication, October 25, 2013). While the two worlds oftentimes merge and work in tandem, it should be noted that positive psychology’s primary instrument for change, the positive intervention, is based on research into the defined variables that promote well-being, while self-help, by definition, is not research-based (Schueller, 2010).
Positive Interventions

In this section, we explore the need, in general, for the positive intervention as an instrument toward the focus on, and practice of, greater connectedness; and then we deconstruct two of its core elements, setting goals and tailoring interventions, as the means for achieving it.

Focus and Practice. Positive interventions are designed to help people both navigate the challenges that life presents and learn new skills and habits that will enable them to flourish and enjoy their lives (Peterson, 2006). While this might seem too good to be true, the field of positive psychology focuses on investigating the foundational elements of the good life as well as creating, testing, and applying positive activities and exercises designed to help people thrive (Pawelski, n.d.).

According to positive psychologists, while genetic and biological factors do contribute to differing levels of human happiness, people can determine whether they want to live above or below their natural set range of well-being. By regularly using positive interventions that focus on identifying, enriching, and applying one’s strengths, people can learn to manage factors within their consciousness and begin to live in the upper reaches of their set range (Pawelski, 2003). Research suggests that making sweeping changes to increase well-being is not necessary. By shifting specific behaviors, attitudes, and thoughts people can begin to change their lives for the better (Layous & Lyubomirsky, 2012)

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) claims that those who strive to gain control of their conscious minds lead happier lives. Because consciousness is self-directed, people can develop the ability to override their genetic predispositions and can choose where and how to focus their attention. In doing so they can identify a goal that they wish to achieve and can then focus their attention and energy on reaching that goal, thereby augmenting their chances of attaining it
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(Melchert, 2002). For instance, if a person has a hard time connecting with other people and maintaining meaningful relationships, rather than thinking that it is because she is socially awkward, she can learn essential social and conversational skills that will allow her to create better relationships with people (Frisch, 2006). Instead of wrestling with negative emotions and subjugating her conscious attention to them, PPIs can recalibrate the mind to focus on actions that produce outcomes that benefit well-being, even if they seem uncomfortable at first (Pawelski, 2003). Whether a person is “involuntarily healthy-minded,” naturally feeling happy about most things, or “voluntarily healthy-minded,” finding goodness systematically, each has the ability to live a virtuous life if adequate attention is placed accordingly (Pawelski, 2003, p.2). When we feel that we have a sense of control over our thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and environments, our lives are enhanced (Maddux, 2009).

The social landscape we currently live in is becoming all the more complex. We are inundated with possibilities that pull us in hundreds of different directions. While this has many benefits, it also adds a level of complexity in our ability to discern what is it is that we truly want for ourselves. Overall, positive interventions seek to promote well-being by giving people, groups, or organizations strategies to access the better angels of their lives. Whether a person naturally feels love and connection with others or does so with intended practice, each has the ability to cultivate love and happiness if adequate attention is placed accordingly (Pawelski, 2003).

By slowing down to take the time to practice positive interventions that help us become more in tune with what we truly want, we can learn to shift our attention on practicing particular thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors that are most beneficial to our well-being and lead us to the life we dream of having.
Setting and Achieving Goals. In order to live love, we have to have the faith that love in fact exists and lives within each of us. As hope theory suggests we often need a speck of light to beam upon us in order to ignite and sustain change (Lopez et al., 2004). In the most subtle and palpable of circumstances we can feel this light enter our bodies and effloresce into rays of sunshine that become the guiding forces in any of our pursuits. According to hope theory, hope is the state that promotes our belief that we can (1) clearly design a goal; (2) develop specific strategies and plans to reach those goals; (3) and launch and sustain the motivation to use the predefined strategies to attain the goals. Lopez and colleagues (2004) differentiate hope theory from goal theory, optimism, self-efficacy, and problem-solving because it sets out to include all of the components of these models within its framework. Hope is both the catalyst for and pathway to change.

Achieving a complex goal can be mentally and emotionally strenuous (Lopez et al., 2004). Especially in matters of the heart, it is the faith that we can achieve that goal that will ignite a spark within us to propel us to stay on track in the face of obstacles and challenges. Edwin Locke’s pioneering research in goal-setting showed that healthy cognitive functioning, self-regulation, self-efficacy, and emotion regulation are key drivers in enhanced task performance and goal attainment (Locke, 1996). His findings uncovered concrete principles to effective goal-setting. He reinforced the need to plan for difficult, specific, and realistically attainable goals in order to increase the likelihood of optimal task performance. Within these parameters, he emphasized that self-efficacy is a critical component of performance. People with high-self efficacy are more likely to develop difficult and specific goals, strategically plan, commit to them, bounce back from failure, persist over time, and achieve their purpose (Locke, 2006).
While Locke provides very specific guidelines to effectively develop and achieve goals, we also need to feel and believe that they can be attained. The body is the locus within which we experience the world. Every external stimuli, sight, expression, thought, interest, and action comes from and through the body (Shusterman, 2006). The cognitive process of identifying a dream and transforming it into a reality can be a very somatic process, by which a healthy dose of optimistic hope can be the motivating force that facilitates change and reinforces our pursuits (Lopez et al., 2004).

**Tailoring Interventions To Audience.** We live in a time when the movement of customizing products or services to fit individual preferences is everywhere. Netflix nominates movies based on past choices, iTunes recommends songs that match individual tastes, phone applications constantly evolve to fit individual needs, and so on. The same can be said for the future of positive interventions. In order for us to have faith and hope that our goals will come to fruition, Layous and Lyubomirsky (2012) suggest that practitioners of positive interventions should consider the unique characteristics of individuals when implementing one positive intervention over the other.

Research is currently being done to test whether tailored interventions provide higher benefits to well-being (Schueller, 2010). In fact, evidence strongly suggests that when individuals prefer an exercise, they are more likely to commit to it and spend more time engaging in it. Not only that, but those that completed exercises that matched their preferences had a significant change in happiness. If this is the case, then positive interventions should be suggested given individual fit, preference, and characteristics.

Every person is different with distinct ages, values, preferences, personalities, cultures, or ambitions. Each of these factors influences how people will react to an intervention. For
instance, a fourteen-year-old extroverted girl may not benefit as much from a spiritual activity as a religious middle-aged man would. Research has shown that when people practice activities that are aligned with their unique characteristics they more likely to stick with the intervention and have higher well-being (Layous & Lyubomirsky, 2012). Activities that feel personally natural, easy, enjoyable, and interesting are more likely to appeal to individuals, thereby fostering greater commitment, effort, and engagement. As Brown and Ryan (2004) denote, as *intrinsic* motivation, (being naturally inclined to explore and master an activity) increases, the more likely a person will commit and enjoy the activity. In contrast, *extrinsic* motivation (doing something as a means to an end) can have inconsistent outcomes for persistence and overall well-being.

As such, the benefits of positive interventions were especially augmented when practitioners administered them in an individual therapy setting where the client’s personal perspective and unique qualities were taken into account (Layous & Lyubomirsky, 2012). Research is currently being done to test whether tailored interventions provide higher benefits to well-being (Schueller, 2010). In fact, evidence strongly suggests that when individuals prefer an exercise, they are more likely to commit to it and spend more time engaging in it. Not only that but those that completed exercises that matched their preferences had a significant change in happiness. If this is the case, then positive interventions should be suggested given individual fit, preference, and characteristics For instance, someone from a collectivist culture might benefit more from practicing other-focused activities (e.g., practicing acts of kindness) while someone from an individualist culture might benefit more from a personal activity (practicing a signature strength). Both of the exercises can become pathways used to welcome more love into a client’s life, it is just done through different approaches most suitable to the needs of the particular person.
Overall, PPIs aim to foster positive feelings, positive thoughts, and positive behaviors. Although there has been a lot of doubt pertaining to the efficacy of positive interventions, there is an overwhelming amount of evidence indicating that positive interventions both increase well-being and relieve depression (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). In a meta-analysis studying the effect that 51 positive interventions have on well-being as well as the variables that moderate their effectiveness, they found that not only do PPIs work, they work well in increasing well-being and decreasing depression across a diverse sample of people under a wide variety of contextual circumstances.

For the purposes of this paper, it is important to note that interventions can build happiness and bring about benefits beyond just feeling good. People who are happy have better social relationships, are healthier, and are more successful, and vice versa (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). We need to realize that in the pursuit of our ideal selves, we have to depend on our close relationships to help achieve our dreams (Gable & Gosnell, 2011). We need to suspend the belief that interdependence will be our undoing. Adam Grant (2013) suggests that we view interdependence as a source of strength that buttresses the skills of people for the greater good. By collaborating with others, opening ourselves to feedback, contributing to the group, and providing support we will create environments where everyone will be better off. If our partners have a direct influence on our movement towards our ideal selves and vice-versa we need to start actively affirming our partner’s goals, values, and needs. We must not forget that relationships are about balance; you have to be willing to give, as love is primarily giving (Fromm, 1956).

Below we will look at specific interventions in which people can begin to cultivate love and connection in their lives based on empirical evidence.
Creating Connection

While love is certainly multidimensional and bidirectional, it can also be deceptively simple, springing up if we are tuned into its nuances. Love is most likely to arise when two or more people connect, bond, or share a positive emotion such as laughter, joy, inspiration, hope, awe, and the like (Fredrickson, 2013a). These moments typically in momentary flashes that are easy to miss, thus if we want to reap love’s benefits, it is suggested that we become mindful and attuned to the practice of love. In her book, Love 2.0, Barbara Fredrickson (2013a) proposes a new theory of love and provides a manual for specific strategies (i.e., positive interventions) that readers can easily employ backed by the results of scientific studies that she and other leading scholars in psychology have conducted. If practiced on a regular basis, evidence suggests that these exercises not only unlock loving connections with the self and others but also alleviate a variety of mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression, self-destructive behaviors, or negative emotions). Below are the micro-moment practices she suggests to tap into the expansive field of love:

- Reflecting on Social Connections: An invitation for participants to reflect on their three longest social interactions at the end of each day in order to assess how connected or in tune they felt with the people they spend most of their time with. Merely reflecting on potential moments of love and connection has shown to increase both positive emotions and social connections.

- Creating Three Loving Connections: Have participants create the intention to seek out and foster more micro-moments of loving connection with others.

- Loving Kindness Meditation: Have participants devote time and energy to practicing the loving-kindness meditation. A meditation that brings awareness to
the sensations of the heart in order to rouse warm, tender, and compassionate feelings towards the self, friends/family, and ultimately the universe.

• Seeing Oneself as the Target of Others’ Love: A meditation practice that invites participants to imagine all of their beloved mentors, friends, and treasured family members standing in a circle to celebrate and love the participant. In turn, the participant is then prompted to extend wishes of safety, happiness, health and love to each of them.

• Self Love Meditation: A meditation practice that invites participants to become gently aware of their breath while conjuring feelings of love and acceptance to the self by repeating specified mantras that offer wishes of loving-kindness.

• Narrating the Day with Acceptance and Kindness: A practice that prompts participants to witness their self-talk for a few days and record instances of inner harshness, unfriendliness, or rigid tendencies without judgment. The participant is then asked to rephrase these negative thoughts with a more accepting, kind, and loving tone.

• Using Personal Suffering as a Cue to Connect: Inviting participants to practice compassion and self-care whenever they experience pain, suffering, or any form of adversity.

• Compassionate Love Meditation: A meditation practice that invites participants to call forth an image of someone who is currently suffering. Participants are then asked to remind themselves of that person’s good qualities while wishing them good fortune and an easing of their pain and suffering.
• Creating Compassion in Daily Life: Participants are asked to replace random mind wandering with mental activities that help build their capacity to connect with others compassionately.

• Meeting Another’s Good Fortune with Love: Prompting participants to look for and be ready for opportunities to connect with others who are experiencing good fortune.

• Celebratory Love Meditation: A meditation practice that invites participants to call forth an image of someone for whom a good event has occurred and wish them continued happiness and good fortune.

• Creating Daily Celebration: Prompts participants to notice signs of good fortune and feelings of love and connection in their immediate environment throughout the day. Creating a mental exercise whereupon participants picture themselves cheering on others, sharing moments of joy and jubilation, or simply smiling at a passerby can create shifts in perspective and personal energy.

• Loving All Meditation: A meditation practice that invites participants to awaken themselves to the potentiality of love or to find joy in connecting to all people they encounter that day.

• Exploring Yesterday to Uncover Opportunities for Love: An activity that prompts participants to recall and map out their entire day with the amount of time each activity took. They are then asked to complete a questionnaire that focuses on spotting and unlocking opportunities for connection, empathy, and altruism.

• Redesigning Job Around Love: Participants are asked to review their own job, work routines, and work attitudes and look for moments when they can make a
conscious effort to connect with colleagues in ways that build relationships, resilience, and more collaborative teamwork.

Simultaneously, Jane Dutton (2003) has further studied and identified deliberate behavioral pathways that facilitate the building and strengthening of High Quality Connections (HQC) between individuals and within groups, with an emphasis in work environments. High-quality connections are relationships marked by mutual positive affectivity, trust, and active engagement within dyads. HQCs have shown to have tremendous benefits to both the individual and the social contexts they reside in. For the individual, benefits include: short- and long-term physical and psychological health, an increase in positive emotions and vitality, and a heightened capacity to become engaged in tasks.

Understanding the benefits of HQCs, for instance, lends way for researchers to develop exercises and strategies that promote, facilitate and enable these positive outcomes. Through her research, for instance, Dutton (2003) identifies four pathways to building HQCs: respectful engagement, task enabling, trust, and play. First, respectful engagement involves acting in a way that shows appreciation and regard towards others (Stephens, Heaphy & Dutton, 2011). Examples of respectful engagement include behaviors such as conveying presence through verbal and non-verbal cues, expressing genuine interest and authenticity, communicating affirmatively, and actively listening. Second, task-enabling includes strategies that promote the successful performance of others (Dutton, 2003). Task-enabling includes focusing on an individuals strengths to foster better performance. Third, building trust is a crucial component of HQCs, as it demonstrates integrity, dependability, and benevolence towards others. Finally, play enables connections in two ways: (1) it stimulates and catalyzes positive emotions between people, promoting novels ways to learn about each other in a non-threatening way, and (2) being
fully engaged in a game with others encourages more interpersonal risk-taking and flow (Stephen et al., 2011).

As we can see from above, how people communicate with one another is indicative of the type of relationship that will form and ensue between them. As such, in working with individuals to improve the quality of their relationships and their connections, it is important to teach them how to respond to each other, especially when things go well. Research suggests that positive events occur more often than negative events. In fact people tend to share good news, experiences, and positive aspects of their lives with someone 60-80% of the time (Gable & Haidt, 2005). The act of making the most out of a positive event (i.e., capitalization) is one of the building blocks to strong, supportive, and long-lasting relationships (Meisel & Gable, 2009). When people capitalize they tend to feel better about their lives, increase their likelihood to be happier, and feel a greater sense of belongingness (Langston, 1994).

More importantly, how people respond to the positive events of others affects the quality of their relationships. Shelly Gable and colleagues (2006) have identified four response styles that are commonly used by people when others share good news. Only one of these response types, however, called Active Constructive Responding (ACR), has shown to increase the quality of life experiences and relationships. ACR is characterized by sincere enthusiasm, energy, and engagement to another’s good news. When people use ACR, they typically ask follow-up questions and encourage the other person to relive their experience. Research further suggests that ACR improves well-being by: (1) enhancing social connectedness, (2) increasing feelings of intimacy, understanding, togetherness, and trust, (2) increasing daily happiness and decreasing conflicts, and (3) increasing motivation and performance (Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006).
Overall, people who use ACR in their relationships feel more understood, supported, and cared for.

While relationships with others can be deeply fulfilling and rewarding, they can also be complex, challenging, and draining (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). Just as good communication is vital to the health and sustainability of a relationship, poor communication is one of the key factors that destroy relationships, especially romantic ones. Practicing resilience, the ability to bounce back from adversity, can help people communicate more effectively, understand each other better, and recover from arguments and conflicts. The authors note that a person’s thinking patterns are emotional and behavioral drivers. As such, when faced with an adverse situation and problem (in this case a conflict with another person) developing a number of resilience competencies is key to fortifying relationships—these include: emotional awareness and regulation, impulse control, optimism, flexible and accurate thinking, empathy and connection, and self-efficacy. In tandem, it is also useful to help individuals identify and challenge cognitive thinking errors, or “thinking traps,” that people may fall into when interpreting events. Developing the ability to let go of limiting beliefs and see a situation from multiple perspectives may help increase levels of intimacy and connection with others (Reivich & Shatté, 2002).

Mindfully creating micro-moments of connection, creating high-quality connections, engaging in capitalization and active constructive responding, practicing resilience---with its attendant qualities of optimistic mindset and cognitive behavioral shifts toward the positive, and letting go of limiting beliefs: these are all pathways to creating the habit of love and practice of love. In this way, we may come to know what it is to live love, to know love, and, as Fromm has said and this paper has shown, to stand in the mastery of the art of loving.
Future Directions

One day we will learn that the heart can never be totally right if the head is totally wrong
Only through the bringing together of the head and heart—intelligence and goodness—shall man
rise to a fulfillment of his true nature.

--Martin Luther King

Throughout this semester I have seen the concept of love and its offshoots (e.g., altruism, compassion, kindness, joy) sprinkled throughout the readings, lectures, and conversations as if it were the hidden agent sparking human connection. In explaining positive psychology, Chris Peterson (2006) summed it up in three words: “Other people matter.” Other people matter in our personal lives, in our professional environments, and in our social climate. We cannot craft a life that is full of positive emotions, engagement, fulfilling relationships, meaning, and accomplishment in isolation. While I am not suggesting that love and connection are the solution to all problems, I believe that developing a more loving and connected culture can only enrich the lives of individuals, groups, institutions, and even nations.

Looking towards the future, I believe that we can begin to create the conditions within which people can start learning, through reflection and experience, what it means to love themselves and others. Research has shown that when individuals are paired over a 45-minute period to carry out discussions that aim to build-relationship, to create platonic intimacy, and to welcome self-disclosure and mutual sharing they are more likely to experience greater interpersonal closeness (Aron, Melinat, Aron, Vaollone, & Bator, 1997). One of the goals of positive psychology is to create environments and institutions that enable positive outcomes for its stakeholders (Peterson, 2006). Just like we have universities that teach science and humanities, I foresee and propose further cultivating the expansiveness of love through experiential learning in the form of classes, workshops, retreats, private events, etc. For instance,
students could be paired with strangers to talk about common themes such as love, hope, relationships, personal accounts and other topics that matter to learn about each other’s experience, bond, and find moments of connection.

In the turbulent days of civil unrest, racial injustice, and economic upheaval Martin Luther King (1963) eloquently and quietly argued for the necessity to have the strength to love in the face of evil, violence and adversity. To King one must have the courage, intelligence, and tenacious will to love and do what is necessary for love to emerge. He begins his book with a quote from the Christian bible, “Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (p. 1). The art of love is so infuriatingly vast, ambiguous, and convoluted despite our many attempts to quantify, qualify, and categorize it. But I agree with King, I believe we have to aspire to be courageous in the pursuit of the greatest desire. We have to fight not only to be loved but fight for our capacity to practice love, for there is nothing greater than to give that which one would like to receive.
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