

Love (Liebe)

From a social systems perspective, love is observed as a *→symbolically generalized medium*, rather than as a feeling, which only concerns a *→psychic system*. Love facilitates the successful expression or negation of feelings, through which the corresponding expectations are produced and the acceptance of communication under particular conditions of improbability is made more probable.

In modern times (since the 17th century onwards), love has been differentiated on the basis of the semantic concept of individuality of the person. Love serves as the foundation for the differentiation between interpersonal and impersonal communication. At the same time, the reproduction of love depends on this differentiation [*→System of Families*].

Love concerns the particular improbability of intimate interpersonal communication. It is improbable that ego accepts alter's wish to talk about her/himself, then to listen to her/him, i.e., to accept her/his idiosyncrasies. Love makes interpersonal communication at higher levels more probable, whereby participants attempt to differentiate themselves from other individuals, to make themselves the topic of communication, to talk about themselves. Such communication is improbable because the interest and consensus of the listener diminishes with the increase in the idiosyncrasy of, and in the singularity of the point of view of the speaker. Demanding ego's consensus and support becomes improbable because alter's perspective is unique, specific and strictly personal. Something particular gains universal relevance: alter is relevant because s/he is how s/he is, and s/he demands that ego takes her/his perspective into account, supports it and confirms it. Love makes intimate personal communication probable because it can take the radical individualization of the person into account.

A particular constellation of attribution is linked with the medium of love: the experience of alter (who is loved) triggers the actions of ego (who loves).

Ego's orientation to the way in which alter experiences her/his actions is not specific of love: we often ask ourselves about the consequences of a certain action from the perspective of the observer. It is more important that this orientation is made concrete and alter's search for understanding, consensus and support becomes the basis of ego's worldview. Love addresses the problem of the improbability of ego accepting alter's experience as the basis for her/his own action; for instance, the improbability of ego watching a TV show s/he hates because alter likes it. Ego loves when alter's experience is the basis for how ego observes and acts. Love is therefore the medium for the construction of the world through the eyes of the other. Ego is incorporated into alter's world, observes herself/himself in this world and finds herself/himself confronted with the alternative of accepting or rejecting alter's egocentric projects.

In the semantics of functionally differentiated society [→*Differentiation of Society*], the medium of love was initially symbolized as passion: people who love suffer something that they can neither change nor explain. In the 20th century, however, the symbolization of love as understanding has prevailed: ego's observation includes alter's relationship to her/his environment.

In order to reach this understanding, love's orientation is to the person. Alter is a person because s/he is grasped in her/his relationship to herself/himself and to the environment. The orientation to the person, thus, permits ego to observe what serves as environment and what serves as structure for alter, in order to process information about this environment. Understanding also means forgoing communication: alter does not need to ask because her/his expectations trigger Ego's action in the most direct way possible. Love makes communication probable in that communication is avoided.

The medium of love must distinguish between what is included in intimacy and what is meant by lack of intimacy, not in the sense of what is alien to love, but of love's negation according to its own perspective (separation). It is the reference to the person which makes it possible to distinguish between love and not-love and to switch from one to the other.

The programs that determine the conditions of correct attribution of love mostly take the form of remembering shared histories, which limits the possibilities of allocating the code values ("that wonderful weekend we spent together"). The reflexivity of love is expressed in the fact that love can only be motivated by love, refers only to love, and only develops when it can connect

with love. Love allows itself to be irritated by the physicality of the partner through symbiotic symbols: these are references to sexuality.

Love is contingent: alter's demands are higher the more alter individualizes herself/himself as a person; someone who loves must always fulfill these demands, but a higher degree of individualization endangers love because it can easily lead to conflict. The question is if ego's actions are really orientated to alter's world and not her/his own. This question cannot be answered because silence is also communication, as it is attributed to a person. Conflicts arise easily because everything is attributed to persons' behavior, and these attributions show if the orientation to intimacy is valid or has come under pressure from problems. The possibility of pursuing small, day-to-day disagreements in love thus avoids risk, because every behavior puts love to the test; however, any conflict can call love into question, because the conflict cannot relinquish an orientation to the person. Love loses value when alter's world is taken into account so strongly that it cannot be translated into ego's daily life ("if you could only be what you are not"). [C.B.]

Love as Passion (1986); Theory of Society (2012: 201; 206-207; 220-226, 231); Sozialsystem Familie, 1988.

