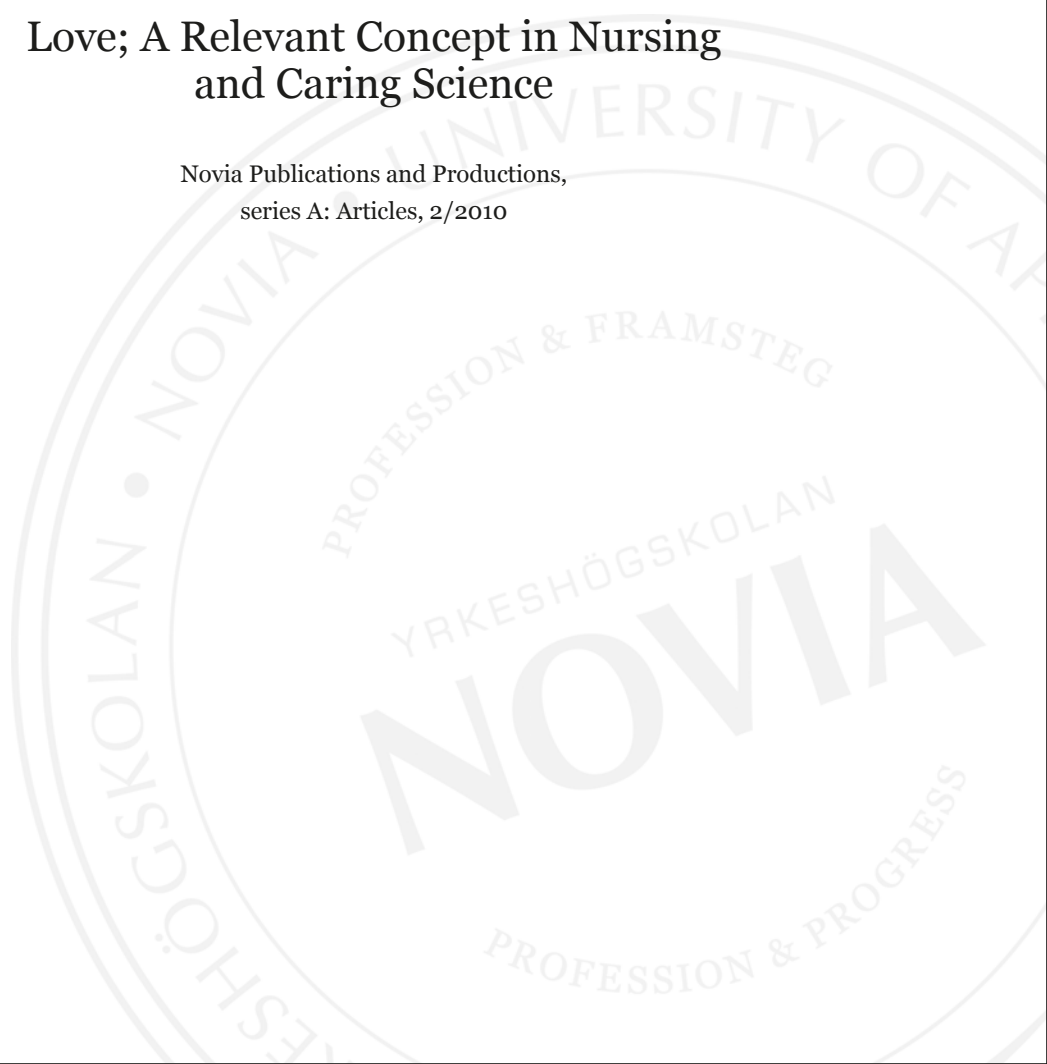


Love; A Relevant Concept in Nursing and Caring Science

Charles Emakpor and Maj-Helen Nyback

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Abstract

Love is for the world what the sun is for the exterior life (Steiner, 1978) and it adds beauty, joy and satisfaction to the practice of nursing and also to the caring process. One reason for suffering is the lack of care, and the motive for caring is, according to Eriksson (2001), love. The lack of love can be a reason for the lack of care, which motivates the study of the concept "love" in caring science. The aim of this article is to describe and discuss the concept of love and the way it is related to nursing and caring science.

Caring science

Caring is essential for human survival and development (Gaylin, 1976, 17) and it manifests the human mode of being (Roach, 1997, 14). Caring is, therefore, something natural and original. This concept of natural caring is expressed through tending to, playing and learning in the spirit of love, faith and hope (Eriksson, 1987).

Caring science encompasses human science (Nyback, 2008) and it systematically studies caring and the caring process. Caring science embraces epistemological pluralism, seeking the underdeveloped intersection between arts and humanities and clinical sciences. It includes ethical, intuitive, personal, empirical, aesthetic, and even metaphysical ways of knowing and being (Watson & Smith, 2002).

Metaparadigm universally identifies the central interest of a discipline (Fawcett, 1996, 4) and summarizes the intellectual and social missions of a discipline (Eckberg & Hill, 927, 1979). In this article, metaparadigm refers to the main framework of caring science which consists of: health, environment, person and nursing (Fawcett 2005).

Health can be viewed in many different ways and Eriksson (1984, 1989) describes health as soundness, freshness and well-being. However, it is also a process of becoming integrated and complete. In the caring process, health is being restored or improved, and suffering is being alleviated. The act of caring always takes place within an environment which, in turn, influences the caring process.

The concept of *environment* refers to our surroundings, which include living and non-living things around us. It also refers to the conditions that we live or work, in and the way that they influence how we feel or how we can work effectively (Cambridge, 2009). People are inseparable from their environment and are, to some degree, always influenced by it. (Thorne, Canam, Dahinten, Hal, Henderson & Reimer, 1998).

A person is a biopsychosocial being that is in constant interaction with a changing environment (Roy, quoted in Tomy & Alligood, 1998, 248). A person is, consequently, in a continuous state of change and never in full completion (Eriksson, 1988). A person is a rational being with uniqueness and dignity (Barresi, 1999) and the true act of caring involves respecting or preserving the dignity of that person (Eriksson, 1987). Caring itself is fundamental to nursing (Schattsneider 1992).

Nursing is regarded as a bridge between human frailties brought about by changes in health and well-being (Hinchliff, Norman & Schober, 1998, 254). Therefore, it refers to the actions carried out by nurses on behalf of, or in conjunction with, the person (Fawcett, 1984). These actions are performed in order to contribute to, or to recover, the health of the person (Henderson, 1966, 15). The fundament of nursing is caring and the ethos of caring is love. Therefore, the motive of nursing can be seen as love.

Love

Love, like suffering and death, appears to be a universal concept (Stickley, & Freshwater, 2002). It is an emotional state that is typically directed at another person. (Rasmussen, 2008). Love, thus, imbues intentional acts of sympathy towards others, in order to promote well-being (Oord, 2005). In effect, love, is an encounter between two differences, while it is also an expression of relationship, solidarity, integration, and a deep feeling of being one and the same (Stickley, & Freshwater, 2002). The basic form of love is the capacity to share and understand the sorrow, pain and joy of others (Glöckler, 2002). Consequently, love begins with knowing, relationships and understanding and it results in the other person's freedom, development and alleviated suffering. When practicing love, we come in contact with the core of our personality

and live a more genuine life (Stickley, & Freshwater, 2002).

Love can, consequently, be described as a natural human characteristic (Eriksson, 1990). This characteristic transforms and reveals a human being's identity, true purpose and deep personal meaning (Merton, 1985). Love can inspire, unite and also break barriers (Cho, 2005). Love is both the heart and unifying force of caring (Ray, 1981). Love may, thus, in light of this, be viewed as the basic core of alleviation of suffering (Stickley, & Freshwater, 2002). Moreover, suffering creates a thirst for love (Glöckler, 2002).

Love is not a skill or something that can be taught, but rather something that can be expressed or experienced. Experiences of love seem to affect a person immediately and influences his/her personality in a way that, almost inevitably, contributes to human development or transformation. Experiences of love may also uncover new aspects of human existence and disclose unexpected possibilities (Stickley, & Freshwater, 2002).

In view of the foregoing reasonings, many researchers have concluded that mankind's greatest necessity is love. Love is connected to other good qualities, such as humility. Nurses who love their patients, thus, possess humility and other qualities that are associated with love (De Vries, 2004). Similarly, a nurse who works in love signals *claritas*, which is the strength and light of beauty (Eriksson, 1990). Therefore, one could say that love is beautiful and desirable. Holistically, love contains both of its traditional divisions: Agape and Eros (Stickley, & Freshwater, 2002).

Agape

Love is often seen to consist of the duality between Agape and Eros, where Agape is viewed as the rational kind of love (Spicq, 1994, 11) that is spontaneous and unconditional. It is an unselfish love towards one's fellow human beings and humanity (Stickley, & Freshwater, 2002). It implies the understanding of and redeeming good will for all men (King 1986, 19). It also implies identifying with one's neighbors and fulfilling their needs (Williams 1968, 262). Consequently, Agape involves profound recognition of the worth and goodness in all people (Brady 2003, 268).

Agape is the power that drives us away from self-absorption and towards the embrace of genuine desire. A genuine desire is one which, when fulfilled, promotes not only our good but also the good of others (Pembroke, 2006). In view of the aforementioned, Agape is simply a self-sacrificing love for humanity which makes it possible to carry out holistic caring (Fitzgerald, 1998, 38). In “caritative” caring, Eros and Agape form a synthesis (Eriksson, 1990).

Eros

Eros is seen as a demanding and pleasure-seeking love (Stickley, & Freshwater, 2002), but also the drive to unite with the object of one’s affection. Eros is the source of vitality, liveliness, and passion. It encourages us to respond to the other person and it pulls us towards him/her (May, 1970, 74). Eros unites humans in productivity (Laszlo, 2009) and it is a physical and metaphysical energy that animates a person in every dimension of his life, including his caring activity (Pembroke, 2006). Eros is, thus, a good and creative aspect in caring (Eriksson, 1990). Eros can imbue passion in nurses, and thus improve willingness to help and show love for patients.

A caring relationship forms the meaningful context of caring and derives its origin from the ethos of love, responsibility and sacrifice (Eriksson, 2002, 62). Love is a strong feeling and when the two forms of love are combined, one starts leading a life of generosity, which is expressed with joy (Eriksson, 1990).

Discussion

In the quest to understand the universe and human nature, humans also need to understand the true meaning of love, since this is just as important as food, air or water. Consequently, many scientists, researchers and people from all walks of life have tried to explain the true meaning of love. Love is a very popular word that we hear in almost all movies and musical works. We even use it sometimes as we go about our everyday activities, but as simple as love may sound, its true meaning has eluded many great thinkers and has cost many a lot of time, energy and effort. Love has, accordingly, been defined as a spiritual, transcendent power that knows, understands and has its own wisdom and science by its knowledge of the inner mystery of participatory life (Merton, 1985). This, in effect, means that the true meaning of love is something that is beyond human comprehension.

However, working with this article, we have come to acknowledge that love is a strong feeling that can be directed towards ourselves or others. This feeling can inspire and unite, as well as break down obstacles or the need for control. When this feeling is expressed or experienced, it triggers joy and happiness within the inner most person of the human. It eradicates grimes and allows for a clearer vision of one's own beauty and that of the other person. Love prerequisites a unified and coherent understanding and it is never baseless or irrational. Consequently, the love for humanity is never baseless as it is based on the fact that every human is an entity of uniqueness or unique personality that needs to be preserved. This awareness steers caring towards the preservation, not just of the person, but also of his uniqueness by means of alleviating pain.

Love gives the nurse a self-sacrificing spirit. In essence, Eros inspires and forms the passion for humanity in the nurse. This in turn activates the energy needed to express Agape which guides the nurse in her actions as she attends to patients in a self-sacrificing spirit. Nurses' expressions of love towards patients can independently expedite the recovery process of the patient, since a suffering patient is more in need of, and more open to, the essence of love (Råholm, Lindholm, & Eriksson, 2002). When the patients feel this desired love, they get a special satisfaction which

transforms them psychologically, and makes them aim for an expedient recovery. Love, when expressed or experienced, can transform and instill a special kind of satisfaction.

Caring has its origin in motherliness which is visible in the relationship between a child and its mother. Observing the way this relationship is expressed, one will notice how tender and respectful the mother is to the child, in the way she tends to, and plays with, the child. This, in itself, has its ethos in love. Therefore, love can make the way nurses tend to and respect patients more appealing and professional. Kind attitudes can relax patients and make them feel like they belong.

Humans, in general, suffer in the absence of love, as the quest for love is inherent to all humans. Therefore, rather than ignoring the concept of love and its relationship to the everyday practices, nurses should embrace it (Fitzgerald, 1998, 38). Love comes straight from the heart, it does not change with pride, and it endures all things, hopes all things and costs nothing. Consequently, Nurses can always give love even in times when they cannot give medication.

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