

♡ THE GEOGRAPHY OF LOVE ♡

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Human beings are born with the capacity to love. The rules and mores, however, which govern the expression of this emotion are learned. For few other emotions do so many rules, regulations, customs and superstitions (both social and religious) exist, perhaps because of the very critical link between this emotion and the procreation of the species. The rules which govern this emotion vary from culture to culture and within the same culture evolve over time, as societies themselves change. As a consequence, love lends itself particularly well to geographical study.

Man experiences many different kinds of love which correspond to different levels in his own being. Throughout this essay it is intended to analyse love from a variety of perspectives and to place particular emphasis on the manner in which it is expressed and rationally explained in different cultures but particularly in our own.

Love has for long been regarded as a mystery - provocative, exciting and sometimes painful. Since the 1950s, however, as a result of work by E. Hatfield and G.W. Walster in "A New Look at Love" - scientists have begun to research various aspects of this most elusive emotion. One theory suggests that love can appear in two very different forms - passionate and compassionate. Passionate love is a wildly emotional state characterised by a confusion of feelings; elation and pain, anxiety and relief, altruism and jealousy, while the latter is a lower key emotion involving deep affection and attachment to someone. Almost all of us make a sharp distinction between our compassionate and passionate feelings. But which of these extremes can be termed 'true love'?

Luminaries from all eras, Plato to Simone de Beauvoir, even little Charlie Brown, have struggled to come to terms with this complex emotion. We Irish too have tried: "Love is like the smallpox... a man may have it mildly but he carries the marks of it to the grave" or indeed "love is the toothache and the colic... it would make you drunk for a year and sick for ten" (McCann, 1972). Even less complimentary definitions of the term refer to love as "the delusion that one woman/man differs from another" (Mencken, 1984), "the dirty trick played on us to achieve continuation of the species" (Somerset Maugham, 1984) and a misunderstanding between the two fools.

The Bible provides a most interesting definition of love. Love is deemed natural if the will is attached to a natural good i.e. that which is presented by the intellect as good - for example, a parent's love for his child, husband's love for his wife etc. In the case of supernatural love which is charitable, on the other hand, God is loved above all things and one's neighbour is loved for God's sake. In his letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul's analysis of love generally holds as the standard definition of true Christian benevolence as recognised by the Church, i.e. "Love is always patient and kind; it is never rude or selfish; it does not take offence and is not resentful. Love takes no pleasure in other people's sins, but delights in the truth; it is always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope and to endure whatever comes" (I Cor. Chp. 13 - v's 4-7).

An alternative theological view addressed to all Christians is that proposed by St. John - "Let us love one another since love comes from God, and everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Anyone who fails to love can never have known God, because God is love" or "God is love, and anyone who lives in love lives in God and God lives in him" (I John, Chp. 4 - v's 17-18).

The interpretations of love as illustrated in the Bible contribute to a geographic as well as a theological understanding of the concept, in their attempt to categorise and explain 'love' as recognised and accepted by Christian doctrine. From a religious viewpoint love is central to Christian faith. A major theme emanating from this is the emphasis placed on the act of sharing - a feature which leads us to a consideration of love where 'sharing' is at the heart of life i.e. within marriage.

Marriage is a concept or institution which attempts to impose a permanence on a relationship. Most marriages in western society nowadays take place as a result of two people 'falling in love' - indeed marriage is perceived as the ultimate step in a loving relationship. But built to last it has historically been concerned with procreation, inheritances, business matters and family connections to which considerations, love as innumerable occasions has had to take a back seat. In every society these are specific regulations regarding whom one may marry, and love, very often has little part to play in marital arrangements. This brings to mind the old tradition of 'cleamhnas' or matchmaking in Ireland in years past where a man tended to choose his bride according to her dowry and the financial status of

her family. It is well known, that in the Western world at the time of the Industrial Revolution, there were restrictions on entry to the matrimonial marketplace. The confirmed bachelor was more common than he is today, and the age of marriage was later - a situation hard to understand for those who imagine that, even at that time, people got married for love and the pleasures of love. In fact although love might spring up between the pair, and even predate the marriage ceremony, this was not normally the sole reason for a matrimonial alliance. One got married mainly for economic reasons (increasing one's property, begetting children to look after one in old age) or to acquire useful family connections. One needed to insure oneself against hardship, poverty, sickness, but also if one was a believer, against sin - the lusts of the flesh ('marry or burn' in the words of St. Paul). Absence of love or sexual incompatibility constituted no great obstacles to marriage. In today's world, there exists various inhibitions relating to whom one may marry, regardless of the love one may have for another. Marriage between certain tribes, religions or classes may be encouraged or forbidden. In India, for example, it was, and in some areas still is, not permitted for one to marry outside one's caste.

Undoubtedly within marriage love exists but social mores, in the past, demanded that it manifest itself publicly in subtle forms. A certain reserve had to be maintained, one had to be modest and undemonstrative. Desire, love and tenderness could only be shown secretly, in those rare moments of intimacy shared by the couple. The ancient and commonplace distinction between modest love in marriage and passionate love outside it, was partly inherited by Christianity as a moral code. In St. Paul, for example, love outside marriage, fornication and uncleanness are condemned. Although he regarded virginity as best, St. Paul unreservedly accepted the institution of marriage and extolled the perfect union of man and wife - "men are bound to love their wives, as they love their own bodies. In loving his wife, a man loves himself". In such a love, husband and wife shall become flesh, a formula which does not merely mean sexual penetration, but also natural trust and fondness for each other and the identification of one with the other.

In contemporary western society, more and more young men and women live together without getting married. For instance in Scandinavian countries long renowned for their liberal sexual mores -

'cohabitation' has become a socially accepted norm. Living together offers a couple the advantage of sharing their (daily?) lives together on the basis of a mutual agreement, and not because a religious or legal institution deems it so.

The concept of love, from a geographical viewpoint displays some interesting features relating to various cultures. Across all cultures the link between expressions of love and religious belief are highlighted. Monogamy, for example, is a custom based on Christian teaching practised in western society. This practice permits each spouse to have one partner only - i.e. "what God hath joined together let not man put asunder" (Matthew, 19:6). Polygamy on the other hand, which is permitted under Muslim law, entails a more liberal arrangement. In this case a man is allowed to have more than one partner, as many as four wives in fact; that is if he treats them all equally. Furthermore, under Islamic law the parents choose the husband for their daughter. The choice, however, must meet with the daughter's approval if the marriage is to proceed.

Whilst love may be a 'many splendoured thing' it is also many faceted. Fromm (1975) for instance, identifies up to six kinds of love including brotherly love, self love and love between mother and child. Whatever it's called, whatever labels are attached, love, in its many forms has probably always been part of the human psyche. Outward expression of love has on occasion been curtailed by social mores of societies in particular periods. The increasing social acceptance of homosexuals in recent decade, owes much to the sexual revolution of the 1960s. However, it also reflects back on a past in which homosexuals were seen as veritable outlaws. Thankfully the homosexual (or gay community) are no longer pushed to the fringes of society. The advent of Aids, however, and widespread ignorance of the condition, threatens to reverse this trend. Homosexuals are as integral a part of society as heterosexuals. Yet, the gay community is, in its own right, a minority group. As such, certain cities and more especially, particular areas within these cities have become focus points towards homosexuals. Thus, we find in the Castro district of San Francisco, that not only do gays constitute a large proportion of the population, but that their involvement in the commercial, social and political life of the area is most marked.

In recent years western civilisation has witnessed a growing commercialisation of love. This is evidenced by the music industry,

the St. Valentine's Day industry and the romantic novel genre. The manner in which love is expressed is increasingly tied to material objects such as cards and flowers. This is probably as a direct result of the highly sophisticated marketing techniques used to link love to these products in peoples' minds. Advertising subtly creates a norm, thereby creating expectations which fuel this huge industry centred on love and romance.

Other cultures too are experiencing changes with regard to the manner in which love is expressed. This whole area is one which merits further inquiry because it promises some intriguing insights, crucial not only to our understanding of the world we live in, but also to our own patterns of behaviour.

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