



Love Is Not An Emotion, by Barbara Frederickson

Love, defined as micro moments of positivity resonance, may thus be the most generative and consequential of all positive emotions. By virtue of being a single state, distributed across and reverberating between two or more brains and bodies at once, love's ability to broaden mind-sets and build resources may have substantially greater reach.

Love, then, is not simply another positive emotion. Rather, it is the momentary phenomenon through which we feel and become part of something larger than ourselves. Meaning in life may thus emerge not from the grand and unrealistic utopian ideals of "happily-ever-after" love, but from what art historian Nicholas Bourriaud calls the "day-today micro-utopias" of shared positivity. Seeing love as positivity resonance also blurs the boundaries that surround the concept of emotion.

Many, if not most, scientific descriptions of emotions locate these affective phenomena within individuals, confined within one person's mind and skin. By contrast, the concept of positivity resonance aligns with perspectives offered within cultural psychology that position emotions as unfolding between and among people as they interact. Seeing emotions as properties of individuals may indeed be a myopic by-product of the Western tendency to perceptually extract focal objects from their contextual surround. By contrast, positioning love as a dynamic process that unfurls across and unifies two or more interacting individuals offers parsimony to accounts of the social and societal functions of positive emotions.

Seeing love as positivity resonance also holds practical implications for how people might strengthen their relationships, families, and communities. Striving to improve these directly can be like telling a complete stranger "trust me" in the absence of any trustworthy actions. By contrast, knowing that relationships, families, and communities grow stronger to the extent that positivity resonates between and among people reveals the value of planning for and prioritizing positivity. Creating activities and safe contexts that allow real-time sensory connection and support the emergence of shared positive emotions becomes the pathway to build social bonds and community. This guidance may be especially valuable within contemporary urban cultures that propel people toward multitasking and technology-mediated social connections. As novelist Ursula Le Guin put it, "Love doesn't just sit there, like a stone; it has to be made, like bread; remade all the time, made new."

