

Love in the Modern Age

Part 1

To start, love no longer exists.

It is thought to have begun its decline sometime in the late '70s, gradually dying out until March of 2020, when it all but disappeared. This has been shown in several studies, from 1995 all the way up until last summer, and the results are very conclusive: love no longer exists.

There are several theories as to the cause of this phenomenon, but since this paper is on more of the practical side, a brief summary will have to suffice. Terry Dolehart's theory was the first, stating that the decrease in love was a result of worsening climate and toxins breathed in from the air. This has since been thoroughly debunked. Rivaling it was a theory that television was causing less family interaction and thus less love. This is still popular today, although more modern approaches tend to prefer social media over TV, and more radical spinoffs state that all forms of entertainment decrease love. However, these are not widely accepted. In 2017, along with the #MeToo movement, several articles were released indicating that the lack of love is a result of an increasingly abusive, patriarchal society, although this is not backed by study. Many other things have been blamed, including increased travel in 2011, decreased travel in 2020, greater poverty in 2009, and greater wealth in 2018. Perhaps the most intriguing theory is that love is no longer culturally acceptable, due to a changing view on how romance ought to be. This idea will be the subject of further investigation later in this article.

Now, before we go further, I ought to address some of the questions I have received over the years. "What is love, really?" "But is it really gone?" "Could it ever come back?" Yes, love is actually, totally, completely, fully gone, at least within a 0.5% threshold. There are still rare instances of true love, but even those usually get turned into chick-flicks. In addition, the few remaining isolated cultures are thought to still have love, but, as one might expect, this is incredibly hard to test. Nobody knows if love will ever come back. It may, or it may not, and in either case we have to be prepared. That is the subject of this paper. As to the first question, the term "love" as it is used today usually refers to the romantic sort, but the love that has been observed to die out fits a much more general definition. In particular, it follows the description of three Greek words: Mania, Pragma, and Agape.

Mania: As many readers might guess, this refers to maniacal, obsessive love. However, what is unintuitive is that this is closest to a pop culture definition of romance of any of the three Greek words. When people refer to love as a fire, or as something

that cannot be contained, they refer to this. For the purposes of this article, and out of an effort to stay in English, I will call this type of love Passion.

Pragma: This will perhaps strike many readers as an odd item to include, but it has been proven that this is dying out in perfect harmony with all other types of love. Therefore it is included. Pragma refers to an enduring connection. It is a close relation that has survived the test of time (or in our case, not) and represents familiarity, tolerance, and trust. In this article, I will call it Friendship.

Agape: I cannot describe this better than the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, and I am not going to try. Agape is “selfless, unconditional love.” It was far from prevalent even in the original 1995 study, and died out long before the rest. For this reason, it is generally accepted that true agape was lost with the garden of Eden. Instances of agape exude both other types of love, but also show grace, courage, and hope for a better future. I have only seen this type of love once. That’s unimportant to this discussion, though, so I’ll move on. There is no English word suitable to describe this, so I will continue to refer to it as Agape.

Part 2

A fair objection at this point is that marriages still exist. Indeed, wedding vows typically indicate passion while speeches usually denote friendship. It is important, then, to understand that all of this is fake. By most recent measurements, 99.83% of marriages include both a negligible amount of friendship and a negligible amount of passion. And of course, agape has not been sighted between a married couple since 2007. Then another question naturally arises from that: why do people still get married? This is, unfortunately, the subject of ongoing research, so a conclusive answer is not yet possible. One theory is that marriages are now arranged again, like the loveless weddings of old, but now by a much more subtle process involving groups of friends. Another theory is that people get married so they won’t have to date, and people date so they don’t have to be single. This operates on the assumption that each of these states is better than the last, even with no love whatsoever. But I digress. Indeed, people are still getting married, even if it has become entirely pointless.

Another point of discussion is that people are still having sex. Babies are still being born. One hypothesis briefly circulated that all of this was fake too, and babies were all born in test tubes, but it was, for obvious reasons, never very popular. The answer is, of course, what you’ve grown to expect: it is entirely without friendship or passion. This was actually the last holdout for love, here in the form of passion, but the 2020 lockdowns struck a fatal blow and it never recovered.

Therefore, if we are to make sense of modern interpersonal dynamics, we must ask ourselves, “Why are people no longer loving?” This is a closely related, though critically different, question from why there is no more love. Most of the explanations from part 1 indicate that people do not love because they are no longer capable of love.

However, newly released evidence suggests that as many as 10% of people can, under certain circumstances, be made to exhibit loving traits, and Doug Lans suggests that the true number is as high as 87% with proper methodology. The other explanation, posited far more recently, is that love is no longer socially acceptable. This would explain why people now only love in controlled environments that make it very clear that loving is the goal. It is also posited that love still occurs in secret and the loving parties simply deny it afterwards. There is, unfortunately, no way to prove this within ethical constraints.

Since evidence is still unclear as to why people have stopped loving, this article will dedicate a section to the practical and societal implications of each theory, and will then analyze a small but key overlap that can be put into practice today.

Part 3

Firstly, we shall analyze the traditional theory: that people can no longer love even if they try. Whether from genetics, entertainment, or financial change, this theory states that it is no longer possible to love. It holds that the 10% of people that did love could only do so in the controlled environment of the aforementioned particular study, and that such a thing does not translate into a real social environment. This theory has several implications. Firstly, it means that relationships are now entirely loveless, and that anyone who expects to be able to love is deceiving themselves. It also means that any expectation of being loved is a red flag for an irredeemable relationship. Any romance under this theory has an ulterior motive from both parties, an ulterior motive that may or may not be malicious. The traditional theory proposes a truly horrible existence, but it must be acknowledged because it may very well be real.

Under the traditional theory, apathy and defensiveness are paramount. This is due to the fact that any attempt at trust, selflessness, courage, or passion is doomed to fail. This inevitability must be known and understood before it can be controlled. Once it is known and understood, apathy and defensiveness are the best tools to maintain footing against the inevitable flood of lying and cowardliness. The flood will be in relationships, the flood will be at work, the flood will even occur in family matters. It isn't out of evil, this is simply a necessary truth if we are to accept that love is impossible. If love cannot be, then neither can friendship, passion, trust, or courage, since all these are necessary facets of that love. The fact is grim. I am not trying to claim this is right or good, and neither is anyone else in the scientific community, but it is our job to understand the truth, and truth does not change, no matter how anyone feels about it. If love cannot exist, no part of love can exist, and that is the fact of the matter.

The implications of the modern theory, that loving is no longer socially acceptable, are somewhat trickier. Under this theory, it is completely possible for anywhere from 10% to 87% of people to love, but since such love is no longer appreciated, any loving tendencies must be suppressed. Under this theory, the controlled environment of the above experiment freed up subjects to act in a more

natural manner, but these natural tendencies are not appropriate to express in the wider world. These considerations have a number of problems that must all be addressed if we are to continue analyzing this theory. We know love is not acceptable, but to whom? Very few people admit they find the death of love desirable, and over 95% of people say they would prefer to see a return of love. Indeed, although plenty of subgroups advocate for a lack of love for certain people, none advocate, or even benefit, from a lack of love entirely. In general, every person on the earth wants to be loved. So how, then, could it possibly be unacceptable?

The answer lies in the fact that people don't want to see others loved. Slowly and gradually, we have drifted into a culture where the degree to which a person wants a rival's love to decrease outweighs the degree to which they want their own love to increase. This is most easily observed in modern politics, where campaigns center around the badness of one's opponent as opposed to the runner's own goodness. Love for others is no longer acceptable, and this simple fact has come to outweigh any personal need for love. Armed with this knowledge, we can now start to analyze the practical considerations of this modern theory.

Firstly, this theory dictates that to show love is to put oneself in great danger. It will, of course, be appreciated by the recipient, but every other person who happens to find out becomes a very real threat. Lovers need to constantly put their lives at stake to maintain such a lifestyle. Therefore, it is much safer and easier to simply never use love, or if necessary, keep any instances of love a tightly protected secret. Furthermore, and once again, I use love not just in the romantic sense, but in every possible use of the word. Under this theory, it is unsafe to exhibit courage, selflessness, trust, friendship, etc. Anything that might even be interpreted as love is a danger. Furthermore, since love is never seen in public anymore, it is difficult to find anyone with sufficient trust to keep instances of love secret. Thus it is never safe to love.

Under this theory, a return of love is possible. Indeed, it is even likely. What is unlikely is that any of us will ever see it in our lifetimes. Cultural change is slow. It took fifty years for love to die out, and it will likely take far longer to recover. With the traditional theory, a return of love is simply one scientific breakthrough away, but this theory indicates it will take far longer. We have to prepare for the eventuality that love will not return with the spring. It may even be gone forever.

Part 4

Now despite all the preaching I've done about love being impossible, unsafe, or never to happen again, I understand that some readers will attempt it nonetheless. Therefore, this section undertakes the challenge of detailing the current literature of how love still may be achievable, both on individual and societal scales. We'll start with the individual discussion:

It is known that to love is still, technically, possible. It may be unsafe or infeasible in a social environment, but it is possible. Therefore we may ask ourselves: how can love be achieved? Luckily for us, the methodology of the experiment that was able to create love has been rigorously and exhaustively detailed. Subjects were first given a series of electric shocks by a concealed instructor, slowly increasing in intensity. However, halfway through the test, the instructor (pretending to be another subject) would express mock horror at the morality of the experiment and leave. Later, subjects would take the position of said instructor, giving the same electric shocks they received to what they thought was a concealed patient. In reality, it was just a speaker box emitting sounds of pain every time a shock went through. Subjects were told to administer every shock in order of increasing voltage, whereupon they were left alone in the room. An exit was placed in view. The study found that 10% of subjects left without administering every shock, 3% then attempted to reach the “subject” they were shocking, and 0.2% attempted to stop the experiment.

The type of love exhibited here is pragma, or friendship. Subjects developed a perceived bond with another person through the experience of being electrically shocked, and then acted in a way that was of no benefit to the subject but did benefit their apparent friend. There are a number of reasons why this experiment worked. First, the loving act in question was of no detriment to the subject. They would have received no compensation for finishing the shocks, and they had received none ahead of time. Second, any social pressure was successfully eliminated from the experiment. Subjects were alone in contained locations, and it was obvious how to leave without a trace. No contact information about subjects had been taken, so it was impossible to follow up with subjects that left. Third, there was physical pain involved. Indicators in both parts of the experiment made it clear that the shocks subjects were administering were the same as the ones they had been given. Therefore, for the first half of the experiment, subjects knew exactly how much each shock they administered hurt, and for the second half, it was left up to their imagination. It is well tested that imagination can bloat things to a much higher degree than they actually are, and that reflected in this experiment: over 70% of the subjects that left did so within the first 5 shocks that they had not themselves experienced.

What does this mean for us? At a glance, it means that inducing love is very, very hard. Other studies that used one, or even two, of the factors listed above had far lower rates of love. Before this, nobody had been able to break 0.3%. But upon looking deeper, this means that there are a very specific criteria that can be used to get people to start loving again. Here they are, listed:

- 1) There must be no sacrifice.
- 2) There must be no one watching.
- 3) There must be unimaginable pain.

In essence, loving should involve zero loss for the lover and a great benefit to the one being loved. Although such a situation in the real world has yet to be conceived, there are a few that come very close. Take shopping cart returns, something that notoriously has to be enforced. This is so convenient it already fulfills the first criteria. Furthermore, it typically fulfills the second at Walmart in the dead of night, since nobody is ever there. A quick side comment by the cashier, despairing at the idea that nobody is watching cart returns, would have a weak fulfillment of criteria 3. Theoretically this could warrant a sufficient amount of sympathy to get shoppers to return their carts unprompted. Would it work? Almost certainly not, but it's a starting point, and the actions of the few shoppers that do return carts could be analyzed for further tests. Ideally, a series of such procedures could find a way to induce the return of love.

Part 5

There is... a third theory. About why people cannot love. It is new and untested, and few people in the world even know of its existence. I fear, however, that it is the truth. The theory goes like this: Nobody loves anymore because love is no longer needed. People loved because they had to, not because it was nice, or desirable, or anything like that. Love was just a fact of survival, and that fact is now obsolete.

This theory terrifies me. It indicates that all our studies about love, our theories about how to make it return, all of it is meaningless. Besides the point. If love is no longer useful, then trying to make it happen will always be a losing battle. Furthermore, it explains perfectly why nobody loves anymore. Why would they? We stopped using horses when cars appeared. We stopped using swords when guns appeared. We stopped loving when... what?

What happened to make love no longer useful? What real evidence does this theory have? Well, we actually have criteria for what it takes to love that we can analyze. First, there must be no sacrifice. That's no good; "no sacrifice" isn't a use. The second, that there must be no one watching, is similarly pointless for identifying any uses. However, the third criteria gives us just what we need. "There must be unimaginable pain." Of course! Love is used to mitigate pain. Therefore, if pain suddenly began to go away, love would have to decrease too. This begs the obvious question: is pain also gone?

Unfortunately, this question is a total standstill, and therefore the death of this theory. Nobody has ever measured this type of pain, because here, it is not simply a neural impulse. Under this theory, people loved due to all sorts of pain. Loneliness, grief, existentialism; all of these can bring about love. To prove this theory true, every type of pain, anything that has been the cause of an act of love across all of existence would need to be measured numerically and without bias. Such a measurement may very well be impossible. Not just impossible with our technology; this would require an

objective understanding of things that are simply not objective. Pain is fundamentally unknowable.

There may, however, be one instance, one piece of evidence, in which we can say that the observed pain was greater than anywhere else: the person and death of Jesus Christ. His death was a truly singular instance of love. It demolished both the first two criteria that should have been required. He made not only the ultimate sacrifice, but also with the direct observation and disapproval of thousands of people. His actions were condemned to such an extent that it bridged cultures, the Romans disapproved, the Jewish people disapproved, even His own disciples disapproved. The only explanation left, then, is that Jesus had seen such a degree of pain that he no longer needed safety or privacy to love. Under greater scrutiny, since Jesus is God, it makes sense that He could see such pain. He can see all pain. Jesus knew the earth was in such pain that He loved even when none of the conditions were appropriate to love.

By this singular piece of evidence, we can conjecture that modern technological advances have reduced each individual's pain to a point so negligible that loving them is no longer important, and love has disappeared as a result of that. Using this, the experiment outlined in Part 4 seems to have jostled the psyche of subjects to the extent that they began to love again simply out of an inordinate degree of pain. I write this because, of course, it's not that simple. If love was simply a matter of giving people electric shocks, we'd have our solution already. No, this goes deeper. Something else is going on here.

Part 6

To start, I'm in love.

Her name is Peggy. It sounds like a name for 80 year old ladies, but it's beautiful, somehow. She works at one of the labs near where I live, the spot where I piggyback my Nature subscription. It's also one of the places I use for surveys, since the people there are so diverse. It was during one of those surveys that we met.

[13:00:13] Me: How would you describe your feelings toward the ethics of electrically shocking subjects during experiments?

[13:00:19] Her: Very negative. Listen, how long is this? I've got somewhere to be.

[13:00:27] Me: Just one more question.

[13:00:30] Her: Alright.

[13:00:31] Me: What are your thoughts on the modern decline of love?

She didn't respond. Just stared at me for 3.7 seconds (+/- 0.2) then turned and left. As she hurried away, a page from her clipboard fell away. I reached down to give it back, but when I looked up, she was gone. The paper was blank except for a drawing of a cat in the top right corner. I think, although I'm not sure, that it was at this point that I fell in love. Does a drawing of a cat show pain? Did I erroneously see pain? Did I fall in love at some other point and now falsely attribute what that point did to this?

The next time I saw Peggy I was conducting an analysis of remnants of love in various workplaces. She was studying experimental treatments for late-stage cancer, which I, at the time, thought was extra conducive to love. I found her while one of her tests was running.

[15:24:43] Me: Hello.

[15:24:47] Her: Oh, it's you. Another one of your surveys?

[15:24:51] Me: Yes ma'am. You got a moment?

[15:24:53] Her: (looking at watch) Five minutes.

[15:24:54] Me: Well, I'm currently surveying for workplaces with traces of love remaining.

[15:24:58] Her: Why?

[15:24:59] Me: And I thought the medical research industry might be a good spot to look.

[15:25:04] Her: Hah! Good luck.

[15:25:07] Me: Does it exist here?

[15:25:09] Her: You're wasting your time, kid. Love hasn't existed here for twenty five years. We do our work out of habit, self-importance, and because it pays. The test I'm running now is meaningless; it's a redundant check of a chemical already found to not work. You think "traces of love" even exist? Christ, you psychologists make me laugh. Here, do some work; mix this flask.

[15:25:28] Me: Do you know of anyone else I should talk to?

[15:25:30] Her: Just mix the flask.

Incidentally, I did find someone else to talk to, an intern in Peggy's lab willing to help record instances of love in his spare time. The intern in particular has requested their name not be revealed. This meant I started returning to the lab every Tuesday. On the fifth visit I happened by Peggy again.

[16:37:12] Intern: Hold on, let me get a paper. (leaves)

[16:37:29] Her: Same experiment?

[16:37:30] Me: Yes, [redacted] here has agreed to help gather data.

[16:37:32] Her: Well, if you ask me, it's a wild goose chase.

[16:37:34] Me: I did ask you, last month. As I recall, you said that exact thing.

[16:37:37] Her: I wouldn't expect any less of myself.

[16:37:51] Me: How's your experiment going?

[16:37:53] Her: Here, I'll show you. Your friend will be a while.

[16:37:57] Me: Did I get the worst intern?

[16:37:58] Her: You got the worst intern. Check this out: Last week I ran tests on six compounds that I already knew didn't work. The week before that, I theorized a new compound, verified it didn't work, then verified the same thing again four times. All told, for this project I've run twenty seven tests, two of which did anything.

[16:38:13] Me: Jeez.

[16:38:18] Her: (knocking over her current mixture) And what does it matter? I do all this work, all this “science” for what? A one percent decrease in late-stage cancer fatalities? Do you know how few cancer cases even reach late-stage anymore? Even the ones that do rarely receive medical attention. No, there is no love here.

[16:38:34] Me: But you could choose a worthwhile study. You’re in charge here.

[16:38:37] Her: This is what they want. This is what I’ll give them.

Peggy and I didn’t speak for the next several weeks. I began to arrange meeting locations such that we passed by each other every time I went to the lab, but I could never meet her eye. I still had her paper with the picture of a cat. One night, I threw it away. The next day, we spoke.

[17:28:43] Me: I have a question. Can art exist? Can justice exist?

[17:28:46] Her: You know the answer to this better than me. Love is a required prerequisite to both of those. Also, that was two questions.

[17:28:51] Me: I found a picture you drew of a cat.

[17:28:53] Her: And you think that was art?

[17:28:54] Me: When did art become a question of science?

[17:28:56] Her: When did love?

[17:29:08] Intern: (enters) Hey guys! (pause) (leaves)

[17:29:27] Her: Alright, I leave here in thirty seconds, and I don’t want to stay a moment more than I have to. I have a dinner with friends tonight, and you’re welcome to tag along. I’m sure they’d love for me to bring a date.

Peggy didn’t love me. I knew that then, and you should know it by now too. Peggy never loved me. She recognized that I loved her, I think, despite her insistence that love didn’t exist, and perhaps began to take advantage of that fact. During our relationship, Peggy was never kind to me. Always courteous, yes, but never kind. Not once. When she left, she took everything but a note.

Part 7

Dear —,

I hope you understand the truth by now. I hope that, during the course of our many interactions, I inadvertently instilled in you some understanding of how people actually think. Because, for all your theories and studies and equations, you never could understand the first thing about human beings. People aren’t equations. I’m not an equation.

When did you first begin to love me? Was it when we slept together? Was it during our first date? Perhaps it was even earlier, mixing test tubes in the lab. Do you understand why you loved me? I do. I understand perfectly.

You see, the difference between us is that you’re a psychologist and I’m a scientist. I use facts. I measure things that are actually measurable. Even if I never performed a single test that made a whit of difference, I at least performed tests that

could have. Your surveys, for all their statistics and precision, could not have done anything even if they worked. Your experiments at my lab? Pointless. Your experiments on me? Preposterous. A human being isn't something to be experimented on. What did you conclude about my love? My kindness? My value as a human being? You never told me that last one.

Because for all your experiments, for all the "science" you performed on me, you never took that last step of looking at a subjective thing in a subjective way. When your study concluded that I didn't love you, you never stopped to think, "really?" When your equation showed that I didn't care about your well being, you never paused to consider, "Is that true?" Well? Was it true?

It isn't. I do love you. I started loving you two weeks ago, on a Tuesday at 6:15 pm. You had just come home from work, late and exhausted, and I had just finished making the same microwave meal you always had. You collapsed at the table and we ate in silence, you with your curry, me with my chicken. The exact same thing we ate every night. Then, out of the blue, you complimented me on how good the food was. That's when I fell in love.

Enclosed with this letter is a pocket computer locked with a code. It contains the address of where I have moved to. Once you finish your project; once you figure out how people can love again, it will open for you, and we can be together again, properly this time.

With all the love you never thought was possible,
Peggy.