



*X and Organization Studies*

# Love and Organization Studies: Moving beyond the Perspective of Avoidance

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## Abstract

Despite its undoubted centrality in modern society, Love has not received the attention it deserves in the study of organizations. Among the reasons for this avoidance is the fact that love is passionate and not authoritative; personal and subjective but not public. To understand the way organizational research can incorporate love, I explore and discuss three interweaving constructs. Eros (or a tale of the self) calls for an expression of the individuality in organizations, in terms of creativity, sense making and experience. Philia (or a tale of trust) contributes to explore trustworthy relationships, welcoming the other and enabling individuals to flourish in the workplace. Agape (or a tale of compassion) refers to generalized love for humanity and opens to the understanding of compassionate leadership. In the discussion, I call for new directions in the study of love as the organization and the organization as love.

## Keywords

love, eros, self, creativity, sense making, philia, trust, friendship, agape, compassion, leadership, social networks, organizational theory

In the summer of 1960, Ray Peterson's memorable track 'Tell Laura I love her', telling the story of a young man dying in a car accident while racing to get the money to buy his girlfriend a wedding ring, inspired 'moral panic after an extract was broadcast on BBC television news'. Chronicles report that 'so great was the furore that Decca Records cancelled plans to release Peterson's disc', because the tragic love story was 'too tasteless and vulgar for the English sensibility', and the '25,000 copies it had already pressed' were scrapped (Laing, 2005). Only seven years later, the world was changing. In the hit of the Summer of Love, the countercultural message of the Beatles' motto 'All you need is love' became the 'anthemic piece' of what the *San Francisco Oracle* (1967) naively prophesized as a 'revolution [that] can be formed with a renaissance of compassion, awareness, and love, and the revelation of unity for all mankind'. Naive because love has then become so thoroughly commodified that it symbolizes very little, like Robert Indiana's iconic LOVE

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sculptures, ‘so famous that many millions of viewers may not even realise it’s an artwork at all’ (Fargo, 2015).

Despite fading from a socio-political to a post-modern and disengaged message, love permeates contemporary society as one of the most celebrated human feelings and experiences. Love is central in people’s everyday lives and business experiences, but is rarely thought to be relevant to theories of organization and, more generally, to organizational life (e.g. Brewis & Grey, 1994). What are the reasons for this neglect? And how can love be included in the study of organizations?

In this conceptual paper, I answer these provocative questions. I move away from a monolithic and rigid approach to love. First, I discuss the ‘avoidance of love’ in organizational research and envisage the possible reasons. Then, I search for traces of the role of love in organizations from the particular to the universal, looking at *Eros* (or a tale of the *self*), *Philia* (or a tale of *trust*) and *Agape* (or a tale of *compassion*) (e.g. Arendt, 1958; Chiba, 1995). Finally, I envisage prospects for a meta-reflection on the organization *as* love and love *as* the organization. I suggest that acknowledging the multiple system of meanings that love assumes in organizational research can boost the understanding of the unfolding processes by which human life constantly, and often unexpectedly, shapes organizations.

## The Avoidance of Love in Organizations

Love has mostly been avoided in early and modern theorizing of organizations. The Marcusean ‘great refusal’ finds its roots in the foundations of the organizational discipline. The father of scientific management, Frederick Taylor (1914), traced an anti-categorical imperative, affirming, ‘In the past the man has been first; in the future the system must be first.’ This characterization by scientific management scholars extended to classical organizational theorists, who described the ‘human organism [as]... a relatively simple machine’ stimulated by situational cues (March & Simon, 1958, p. 13), and partly to contemporary organizational research claiming that ‘context-generic’ cognitive abilities and personality itself represent ‘the “building blocks” on which specialized expertise can be developed’ (Ployhart & Moliterno, 2011). I suggest two main reasons for this neglect: love speaks to passion and desire, whereas organizational life emphasizes rationality and authority; moreover, love is personal and subjective, whereas managerial knowledge claims to be public and generalizable. Love, therefore, is ineffable, is inexplicable epistemologically, and its immense productivity is unmanageable.

### *Love is passionate*

Love imposes a quantum change in people’s lives, such that lovers might claim, ‘Love is a striking example of how little reality means to us’ (Proust, 1927/1998). ‘There is no love that is not an echo’ (Adorno, 1951): love shapes the person as it shapes the way the person sees the context where she lives and works. On the other hand, organizational life tends to privilege authority over passion, normativity over self-realization, and thus to shrink the expression of the inner individual identity.

Love is avoided because it calls for a full expression of the self, something conflicting with the normative authority of organizations. Organizations constantly form macro-cultures that generate isomorphism and increase the level of inertia that employees and firms themselves experience (e.g. Abrahamson & Fombrun, 1994). And individuals often display personality and value profiles similar to those of their top managers (e.g. Giberson, Resick, & Dickson, 2005). But love contradicts this logic of homogeneity. Love calls for exception rather than regularity, for singularity rather than homogeneity, for what Barthes (1981, p. 7) called a ‘*mathesis singularis* (and no longer *universalis*)’.

## Love is personal

Love is personal and subjective; it is the ‘power to see similarity in the dissimilar’ (Adorno, 1951). Conversely, ‘Science is public, not private, knowledge’ (Garfield & Merton, 1979). Love demands unqualified faith; but ‘the institution of science makes skepticism a virtue’ (Merton, 1938). This contrast is at the core of the Byronian (1817/2015) reflection that ‘Sorrow is knowledge, those that know the most must mourn the deepest, the tree of knowledge is not the tree of life.’

The Dionysian nature of love constantly changes, and suddenly changes the person who experiences it. As claimed by Claudius in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (2003 ed.): ‘The fire of love always burns itself out, and nothing stays the way it began.’ The troubled flexibility of love contrasts with the rigidity of many aspects of organizational functioning. Although modern organizations are intrinsically dynamic and evolving, as Hanna (1985, p. 63) points out, ‘Yet their structures, managerial styles, and rewards systems actually inhibit the utilization of the inner connections that underlie creativity.’

The struggle between a public view of the organization and a personal view of love calls for rethinking the way we study workplace relationships. The word love is an ‘irreducible affirmation’ of the Other, that is, ‘to respect the Other, to pay attention to the Other, ... to address the Other as Other, not to reduce the otherness of the Other, and to take into account the singularity of the Other’ (Derrida, 1997a). Love does not imply possession, but enlightens the individuality. When affirmed by love, relationships assume a personal meaning and are no longer only instrumental. They are based on a single word, on what Heidegger called *zusage*, which means to accept, to say ‘yes’, to affirm the Other rather than the self (Derrida, 1997a).

## Love-Related Constructs: Eros, Philia and Agape

Love has mostly been avoided in the theorizing of organizations because of its passionate and personal nature. Using the words of Barthes (1971/2009), it is a concept that has to be understood ‘more in a grammatical than in a logical sense’. No single word, not even the word *love* itself, can fully express its multiple meanings; but its plurality renders love pervasive in people’s lives in the workplace. Thus, I search for traces that capture key aspects of love in organizations. The quest for such qualifying elements of love pre-existed modern thinking, as evoked by the semantics of Greek mythology: the multifaceted nature of the word love was embodied by the muse Polymnia, ‘the name of many names, the hymn of many hymns’, sister to Erato, the muse of erotic poetry (Nonnus, 1940). Following the tradition of Greek philosophy (Soble, 1989), I look for the organizational meanings of love, exploring the relevance of the concepts of *Eros*, *Philia* and *Agape*. The three constructs interweave, leaving a textual ‘trace’ linking the micro to the macro: from Eros as a tale of the *self* (in terms of self-expression and creativity), to *Philia* as a tale of *trust* (in terms of reciprocated tension towards the other), to *Agape* as a tale of *compassion* (in terms of compassionate and generalized love for humankind).

### *Eros, or a tale of the self*

Eros intimately represents the realization of the individual’s *self* beyond social and organizational norms. Eros defines what Heidegger (Arendt & Heidegger, 1925/1998, p. 31) called the ‘ecstatic temporality’ of love, an act of intrinsic affirmation of the self that ultimately means ‘to be urged to the most proper existence’. This existential view of Eros as ‘the first condition of all cognition’ (Jung, 1961) suggests that ‘the essence of eros is nothing erotic’ (Babich, 2006, p. 6); rather, it is an ‘ecstasy of being’, an ‘intensive and entire comprehension’ of the individuality (Schuback, 2012, p. 138).

From an organizational perspective, Eros enlightens the individual's authentic *being* and *thought* (Heidegger, 1927/1996). Eros is a gateway to understanding what Hamlet revealed as the 'quiddity' of life: a sudden and ecstatic comprehension of the self, its will and its thinking. This is why Eros can be conceived as a social, intellectual and aesthetic force that pushes human thought to *authenticity* (Bowles, 1993). Bernard Williams captures this wire bridging Eros and authenticity simply as 'the idea that some things are in some sense really you, or express what you are, and others aren't' (in Guignon, 2004, p. viii). Eros acts through an instantaneous, hypnotic process that leaves the individual shaken, 'electrified, stunned, "paralyzed" as Menon was by Socrates' (Barthes, 1978, p. 189): this process may force the person to the expression of the authentic self even while pressured by organizational norms.

The hypnotic force of Eros is preceded by a 'twilight state', a 'wondrous serenity' that is 'merely a waiting, a desire' (Barthes, 1978, p. 190). Eros requires a 'release switch', a trigger, a jolt: like in Goethe's *Werther*, 'From the loved being emanates a power nothing can stop and which will impregnate everything it comes in contact with, even if only by a glance.' The 'bait' of that power might be 'occasional', but 'the structure is profound, regular, just as the mating season is seasonal' (Barthes, 1978, p. 190). Hence, a conflict between individual freedom and social structure emerges. Eros calls for an expression of the self that contrasts with the logics of organizational and economic rationality, because it is uncompromised and unconnected from social and collective duties. If the neglect of Eros represents the 'exile from the image-repertoire' that propels the economic rationality, what are the boundaries between freedom of self-expression and organizational goals? The tension between two competing economies, one of organizational rationality and one of personal and irrepressible expression, captures the longstanding 'sadness of progress' that still permeates organization studies. This irreducible conflict is the central theme of the Goethean conflict between Albert and Werther, as described in the words of Barthes:

On the one hand, there is the lover Werther who expends his love every day, without any sense of saving or of compensation, and on the other, there is the husband Albert, who economizes his goods, his happiness. On the one hand, a bourgeois economy of repletion; on the other, a perverse economy of dispersion, of waste, of frenzy (*furor wertherinus*). (Barthes, 1978, pp. 84–85)

In confronting this dilemma between competing rationalities, can the self either accept or refuse Eros? Are we *agentic* in the face of love? *Amo* means *volo, ut sis*, Augustine said: Eros means will, and love means I want you, as you are, what you are (Arendt & Heidegger, 1925/1998, p. 31). The will of Eros is a striving towards experience that encompasses a 'breaking through while breaking down' (Heidegger, 1952/1981, p. 81). Hölderlin (1800/1988, in Schuback, 2012, p. 148) described this experience as a 'free artistic imaging, a terrible but nevertheless divine dream'. Schelling further elaborated on the 'will of love' (*Wille der Liebe*) as the ecstatic experience of learning from and while becoming oneself. The individual experience of Eros is a mode of revealing (in Greek, *aletheia*), a learning process by which the individual brings her thoughts to appearance. Recalling Heidegger (1954/1993, pp. 317–319), 'Through bringing-forth the growing things of nature as well as whatever is completed through the crafts and the arts come at any given time to their appearance.' This revealing, indeed, 'Gathers together in advance the aspect and the matter of ship or house, with a view to the finished thing envisaged as completed, and from this gathering determines the manner of its construction.'

Because calling for a free expression of the self, Eros can enlighten important organizational phenomena, including *creativity* and *sense making*. It is from the response to an erotic occasion that creative ideas emerge. Creativity is, indeed, essentially a cognitive phenomenon that realizes the fundamental tension implicit in Eros. Eros 'impels the individual to create union with another'

(Bowles, 1993, p. 1273). However, the focus of organization studies has progressively shifted away from such an approach to creativity, due to a more contingent interest in understanding what environmental conditions facilitate creative expressions and in the performance implications of creativity (e.g. Rosing, Frese, & Bausch, 2011).

Eros also triggers the process by which individuals make sense of their organizational experience and relationships. 'Sense making occurs in organizations' when members confront events and issues 'that are somehow surprising, complex, or confusing to them' (Cornelissen, 2012, p. 118; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014, p. 64). Eros provides that 'light touch' that bridges the gulf between the 'intersubjective sense of shared meaning' and the intimate, personal experience by which people make sense of their life within the organization (Gephart, Topal, & Zhang, 2010, p. 284). In this sense, Eros depicts organizational life as an 'ongoing accomplishment that emerges from efforts to create order and make retrospective sense of what occurs' (Weick, 1993, p. 635).

Building on this inherent dichotomy between freedom of self-expression and organizational constraints, Eros has further been conceived as a form of rebellion of the individual's freedom against the organization and the whole society, such that 'the poet, like the lover, is a menace on the assembly line' (May, 1969). The commodification of Eros in many aspects of contemporary life, from mass-media interest to the diffusion of love-centred on-line and off-line industries, brings into question whether Eros still overlaps with self-affirmation, or whether, as prophesized by Marcuse (1969), this trend has 'created a second nature of man which ties him libidinally and aggressively to the commodity form'.

Understanding Eros as a physical act of rebellion also calls for looking at the role that *sexuality* plays in organizations. Being a thing of nature (or *physis*), the sexual side of Eros is appearance in the highest sense: 'For what presences by the mean of physis has the irruption belonging to bringing-forth, e.g., the bursting of a blossom into bloom, in itself' (Heidegger 1954/1993). However, sex has historically found the doors closed when approaching the study of organizations. In the Middle Ages, 'the feeling of shame surrounding human sexual relations' was less conflicting, such that wedding guests and the owner of the land were admitted to the nuptial bedroom and could see the married couple undressed as a sign of good health and fertility (Elias, 1978, p. 169). But with the rise of the capitalist life, the suppression of sexuality became one of the first aims pursued by bureaucracy in the workplace (Guttek, 1985). For example, even before the industrial age, the bishop of Lincoln, Robert Grosseteste (Cleugh, 1963), affirmed that sex, as well as rioting, drunkenness and lack of discipline, were all synonymous in threatening 'both civil obedience and those church activities which were taking an organizational form' (Burrell, 1984). Burrell (1984, p. 99) further described the example of an 18th-century Quaker reformer and management consultant, John Fothergill, who saw his own celibacy as a key principle of organizational rationality, efficiency and good management. And Quakers-inspired Elizabeth Fry's reform of Newgate Prison resulted in removing the prisoner's family and his sexuality from the building and substituting them with a codified bureaucracy (Burrell, 1984, p. 106). Following these ideas, the suppression of sexuality has been growingly associated with the development of forms of control over time of production and the human body. Sex was considered counter-productive because inimical to capital accumulation (Thompson, 1968).

In contemporary organizations, there is generalized acknowledgement that 'the line between public and private behavior evaporates' (Gilbert, 1976, p. 87) and the study of sex in organizational life is no longer seen as 'dirty' (Harding, Ford, & Fotaki, 2013). Emerging research is exploring the spillover effects that sexual activities have on work behaviour and satisfaction: for example, when employees engage in sex at home, they tend to increase their daily job satisfaction and reduce work-related conflicts (Leavitt, Barnes, Watkins, & Wagner, 2017). The bridge between Eros and the

organization, however, also presents a dark side – the ‘incapacity to express the relation between language and truth’ well discussed by Adorno in *The Jargon of Authenticity* (1973). The routinely and commodified narrative of sex that is increasingly common in the workplace risks falling into an ‘objectivism’ that ‘loses the intent of reflection to maintain a self-consciousness of the mediation of fact through the thinking subject’ (Schroyer, 1973, p. XIII). Although thought, made and told to seem authentic, sex risks degenerating into artificiality. Ironically, ‘Whoever is versed in the jargon does not have to say what he thinks, does not even have to think it properly.’ ‘The jargon [indeed], takes over this task’ (Adorno, 1973, p. 9). Further research on sexuality at work could study these nuanced connections between freedom of individual’s self-expression, socially controlled routines, and organizational functioning (e.g. Berdahl & Aquino, 2009; Brewis, 2005). Despite the illusion of a progressive freedom, is it the case that the dissolution of the boundaries between private and work life (e.g. having work-related email server, Facebook and even Tinder on the same smartphone) makes employees’ lives progressively resemble Bentham’s Panopticon (Burrell, 1984, p. 109), where everybody’s existence is externally controlled, even if apparently independent?

### *Philia, or a tale of trust*

Philia is the strength of *trust* that breaks the relational boundaries between Ego and Alter (Aristotle/Crisp, 2014). Philia extends its meaning beyond the affective and emotional contact that a person experiences while trusting the other; it also incorporates trust towards the family and the political community, as well as trustworthy behaviour toward acquaintances and business partners. The famous opening line of Mark Antony’s speech in Shakespeare’s (2004 ed.) *Julius Caesar* represents a clear example of this broader conception of Philia: ‘Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears.’

Far from being limited to the intimacy of a trustworthy relationship between two single individuals, Philia is a relevant construct for organizational life: it looks at interpersonal relationships as embedded in larger structures of trust involving the overall community. The first implication of Philia for the study of organizations is portraying a kind of organization that is *open to the other*, that *welcomes the other*. As reported by Derrida (1997b), ‘There is a tradition of cosmopolitanism ... which comes to us from, on the one hand, Greek thought with the Stoics, who have a concept of the citizen of the world.’ Philia contributes to assimilate the newcomer, or the stranger, in the organization and to make her or him a citizen of the organization. Through ‘altruism, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, and courtesy’ (Organ, 1988), Philia intimately implies cultivating the practice of organizational citizenship behaviour, and nurturing its beneficial effects for organizational life and functioning.

Unlike the aseptic Weberian view of bureaucracy as an ‘iron cage’ that affords a level of efficiency that modern organizations cannot do without (Adler, 2012, p. 244), Philia reinforces the personal meaning that people assign to their organizations. By welcoming the other, people become themselves less strangers to their own organizational experience. This process is the object of the chapter ‘The stranger’ in Simmel’s *Sociology* (1950, p. 402). The stranger is by nature ‘no ‘owner of soil’ – soil not only in the physical, but also in the figurative sense of a life-substance which is fixed, if not in a point in space, at least in an ideal point of the social environment.’ What is peculiar in this description is the relevance of Philia as a source of trust beyond the dyadic interaction between individuals. Philia is a general, organizing principle of work-life and work practices, ‘something which potentially prevails between the partners and an indeterminate number of others, and therefore gives the relation, which alone was realized, no inner and exclusive necessity’ (Simmel, 1950, p. 410).



Philia, therefore, is not only one of the most fundamental judgements that can be made about another person (Ferrin, Dirks, & Shah, 2006); it is also a powerful source of organizational functioning. Key components of trust are predictability, consistency and openness – all elements that conflict with organizational logics of opportunism and efficiency (Tasselli & Kilduff, 2017). Hence the question: To what extent is Philia more an *aspiration* for communality with others than a real *organizational practice*? Kant (1997, p. 424) claimed that ‘Friendship is an Idea [*Die Freundschaft ist eine Idee*], because it is not drawn from experience, but has its seat in the understanding.’ The impossibility of Philia depends on his ideological absolutism that conflicts with the mixing experiences of people’s lives. ‘[Its] measure is always the maximum. ... So ... no friendship ever matches the Idea of friendship.’

Following this logic, Philia introduces an organizational paradox. Although aimed at empowering trust and reducing strangeness, Philia risks engendering *closeness* and *favouritism* within closely-knit cliques of trustworthy others, to the detriment of the rest of the organization. ‘The pressures toward uniformity among group members ... instigate communication as a means of reducing attitude discrepancy between the communicator and other group members’ (Newcomb, 1978, p. 1076). Because of homophily processes, organizations may become more homogeneous in norms and values but also increasingly stranger to those who do not share the same bounding characteristics and behavioural norms of other members. This paradox results in a dilemma: is Philia ultimately an ethical construct? What are the boundaries between closeness and rationality, between neutrality and favouritism? Simmel (1950, p. 410) approached this question by praising the objectivity of the stranger as somebody who is ‘not radically committed to the unique ingredients and peculiar tendencies of the group’. Interestingly, in the view of Simmel, ‘objectivity does not simply involve passivity and detachment; it is a particular structure composed of distance and nearness, indifference and involvement’. And he mentions the example of those Italian cities that used to ‘call their judges from the outside, because no native was free from entanglement in family and party interests’. More extremely, following Aristotle, Derrida (1997b) escalates the dilemma as a conflict between friendship and justice, such that ‘you have to go beyond or sometimes betray friendship in the name of justice’.

Despite those open questions, it is undeniable that individuals *flourish in the workplace* when they engage in trustworthy and positive relationships with co-workers (Colbert, Bono, & Purvanova, 2016). We could even say that individual uniqueness emerges from interactions with others (Gulati, Kilduff, Li, Shipilov, & Tsai, 2010). From this approach, Philia can be conceived as a dimension of individual personality, a system of construing by which the individual relates to others, a system where interpersonal closeness to others contributes to develop a whole theory of the self. Psychological research took this perspective in analysing whether and how the individual’s connection with others contributed to improve their personalities (e.g. Rogers, 1956). The others are a ‘lighthouse’ through which people see the outside world and can make a positive change (Kelly, 1955). Approaches to personal change based on Philia are also common to the organizational experience: they include coaching, empathic interaction, empowerment and even democratization of work processes, and are often adopted during leadership training or coaching programs (e.g. Farias, 2017; see also a recent review by Tasselli, Kilduff, & Landis, 2017; and Weiss, Bates, & Luciano, 2008).

The emphasis on the ‘implication of Philos in organizations’ (Krackhardt, 1992), with its focus on trustworthy ties among individuals, has been paralleled by a growing attention to the reverse processes by which individuals opportunistically exploit their social relationships. The most remarkable example of such opportunistic behaviour is the *tertius gaudens* strategy depicted by Simmel (1950, p. 182), where single individuals derive an advantage from ‘an emerging conflict

of two elements' to the detriment of the collective interest. This mechanism can explain the spread of tensions, and ultimately of *incivility*, in organizations and social communities:

The emphasis is rather put on that which divides them [employer and employee], because community is now sought on the side of the associate, and is, of course, found precisely in that which constitutes the antithesis between the two and the superior. (Simmel, 1950, pp. 162–163)

Recent research suggests that hate and incivility can trigger uncontrollable spirals once they reach a tipping point, escalating into epidemic proportions that can derail the life of organizations and societies (Andersson & Pearson, 1999, p. 461). Thus the networking patterns of *Philia* are mirrored by similar patterns associated with hate and uncivility, with a subtle but dangerous difference: whereas *Philia* mainly and intimately pertains to the socio-emotional sphere of the interacting individuals, incivility seems to spread more easily from the individual to the collective. In an unforgettable page, Jacob L. Moreno described this terrifying process in his analysis of the networking patterns behind Soviet purges:

It would seem unnecessary to punish more than a few, but the cold politician, Stalin, knew that, besides the few men who had been direct associates of Trotsky, there were literally thousands more, potentially equally dangerous, who could be just as threatening to his regime ... Unfortunately, he had only a rough, instinctive picture of the networks ... So ... he gave orders that not only the friends of Trotsky but also the friends of these friends, and the friends of these friends of the friends of Trotsky be 'purged', even if the suspicion of any friendly relationship was very slight. (Moreno, 1941, p. 31)

### *Agape, or a tale of compassion*

Agape originally refers to the superordinate love of God for man and of man for God, and defines more broadly the love arising from the feeling of *compassion* for the entire humanity. Agape implies a kind of love that is transcending of the particular, and is well captured by the biblical quotes 'Love thy neighbour as thyself' (*Leviticus* 19:18) and 'Love thine enemy' (*Matthew* 5:44). Agape differs from Eros because it does not encompass any individual possession or achievement, and differs from *Philia* because it does not require any kind of exclusive interpersonal relationship. Agape is experienced in a 'radical inwardness' that transcends the 'natural inclinations of Eros' and the privileged interaction with the Other fostered by *Philia* (Adorno, 1973). Agape reconciles the 'antagonism between natural instincts and socially formed selves' (Schroyer, 1973, pp. X–XI).

This reconciliation raises the question of whether Agape is *universalistic* and *inclusive*, or still *personal* and *particular*. Kant and Kierkegaard supported a universalistic view of Agape as love for another person *qua* human being, independently of any other attribute or characteristic. To the contrary, Aquinas challenged the universalism of Agape, suggesting that while human beings should be charitable to all, Agape would be oriented especially towards those to whom they are related (McDonald, 2003). Far from the philosophical sphere, recent organizational research has shown that employees often receive evaluations in the workplace because of who they are rather than because of what they do (Pearce, Branyiczki, & Bigley, 2000, p. 148). Particularism can undermine organizational functioning and lead employees to advance legitimate claims concerning organizational justice. In organizations, clan-like logics based on cultural, demographic or social attributes often push under-represented groups to the margins of the organization (Mehra, Kilduff, & Brass, 1998). Fuelling organizations with Agape contributes to unlock the benefits of diversity toward the construction of an inclusive organizational culture (Stevens, Plaut, & Sanchez-Burks, 2008).



A second key aspect of Agape's importance for organization studies is *gratuity*. Agape is a form of 'descending' love, an oblation love (or *amor benevolentiae*) that becomes transparent and aims at the other's accomplishment independently of individualistic reward. By means of Agape, giving is more important than taking. This approach is paradoxical because it openly contradicts basic tenets concerning the functioning of social relationships (Belk & Coon, 1993). Anthropologists Mauss and Halls (2000) claimed that reciprocity motivates gift giving; sociologist Homans (1958) envisioned social exchange as a foundational principle of human interaction. But Agape implies a gratuitous kind of giving that does not expect any return of reciprocity. This is, for example, the meaning of the *beau geste*, by which 'individuals marginalize themselves for a moment, while catching the attention of an audience' (Greimas & Fontanille, 1993, p. 21). Or, in other words, the deliberate act of 'provocation against an "organized" world in which economic rationality seems to prevail' (Bouilloud & Deslandes, 2015, p. 1095). Sociologists have recently started to investigate this phenomenon from a structural perspective by looking at cyclic configurations, i.e. groups of three or more people in which each individual provides social resources, including advice, knowledge, or friendship, to a co-worker without any reciprocation, and receives the same kind of resources from a third actor in the group (Block, 2015). Agape is thus an antecedent of interpersonal collaboration and interconnection. However, doubts remain over the organizational pervasiveness of this construct. This doubt is well expressed by Derrida (1994, p. 137): A 'gift must not be bound, in its purity, nor even binding, obligatory or obliging'; such that 'For there to be gift, it is necessary that the gift not even appear, that it not be perceived or received as gift' (Derrida, 1994, p. 16).

The revolutionary range of Agape is thus restricted to behaviours compatible with organizational life. Nevertheless, Agape helps conceptualize forms of prosocial, compassionate and even self-sacrificing *leadership*. When shifting from *Philia* to Agape, the Heideggerian experience of love shifts from 'belonging to you' to 'belonging to all'. This is the experience depicted by Saint Gregory's Pastoral Rule, in which the good pastor must be rooted in contemplation, such that he is able 'to take upon himself the needs of others and make them his own' (Benedict XVI, 2005, p. 5). This experience is mirrored by leaders who promote *compassion*, and foster the welfare of the individual, group or organization that they lead (Brief & Motowidlo, 1986). Like Britain's Queen Mother visiting Londoners during WWII bombing, or like a US past President shaving off his hair as a sign of empathy for an employee's young son affected by cancer, compassionate leaders show concern and emotional closeness towards the sufferance of their peers and followers (Dutton, Frost, Worline, Lilius, & Kanov, 2002). The view of compassionate leaders clearly contrasts with traditional leadership perspectives emphasizing supernatural charisma or economic transaction. The tension between such different leadership approaches questions the primacy of either moral or practical determinants of human action. Kant claimed that a leader's decision-making is grounded in pure practical reason, whereas for Schopenhauer leadership arises from feelings of compassion towards others (Guyer, 2012). Organizational theory suggests a possible bridge between such competing perspectives on compassion and leadership. Compassionate leadership might be beneficial for both the leaders and their followers, because the leaders experience their activity as meaningful and the followers increase their commitment to the organization (Hackman & Oldham, 1976).

The self-sacrifice implicit in Agape can also entail a *dark-side* in the domain of organizational life. Do organizations use benevolence, compassion and sacrifice as ways to smoothen individual resistance and force members to achieve organizational goals? In Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989), Stevens, the butler of Darlington Hall, sacrifices his entire life 'to make our small contribution count for something true and worthy. And if some of us are prepared to sacrifice much in life in order to pursue such aspirations, surely that is in itself, whatever the outcome, cause for pride and contentment.'

The question remains of whether organizations leverage individuals' self-sacrifice to pursue their goals irrespective of their employees' freedom and welfare. Deaths caused by overwork or job-related exhaustion (e.g. the Japanese *Karoshi*) are becoming an increasingly common phenomenon in many industrialized countries. Even in organizations that apparently promote individual creativity and work-life balance, subtle organizational leadership styles tend to impose cultural homogeneity and increase intellectual conformism. In general, traditional rigid forms of task-division and job-control, typical of Weberian total institutions, are progressively shifting to Foucauldian expressions of indirect and manipulative control, often empowered by forms of (apparently) flat hierarchy (e.g. Tasselli, 2015, p. 865). This possible dark side of Agape is reflected in the detailed description of modern organizations depicted by Marcuse (1966) in his *One Dimensional Man*:

In the most advanced areas of this civilization, the social controls have been introjected to the point where even individual protest is affected at its roots. The intellectual and emotional refusal 'to go along' appears neurotic and impotent... The individual by himself reproduces and perpetuates the external controls exercised by his society... A Self (Ego) transposes the 'outer' into the 'inner'. (pp. 9–10)

A promising area for future research on Agape in organizations encompasses the understanding of the motivations behind individuals' choices to express their love for humanity. Of particular interest for organizational research is the role of *faith* and *religion* in activating Agape in the workplace (Tracey, 2012). In *The Protestant Ethic*, Weber (1930/2002) described the surge of the 'capital spirit' as the historic intersection between economic opportunity and protestant values. Durkheim (1912/2001) emphasized the symbolic value of religious beliefs as 'totems' that generate collective systems of meanings and logics of action. Further work would understand whether and how religious conversion changes individuals and organizations. Psychological research shows that conversion from 'sinner' to 'saint' can result in changes in personality functions such as orientations, attitudes, goals and in changes in individual identity (Paloutzian, Richardson, & Rambo, 1999, p. 1047). Conversely, a sociological study suggested the hypothesis that the monastery life compensates for the absence of the family by substituting love for the family with Agape, i.e. the generalized love for humanity (Della Fave & Hillery, 1980). What are the organizational consequences of religious faith and behaviour? One of the few organizational studies on this topic has suggested that religious managers tend to have positive effects on the workplace environment because they tend to be 'less self-actualizing' and more concerned toward the achievement of communal goals (Senger, 1970, p. 186). An open question concerns the boundaries between individual freedom and ideological constraint, interrogating on whether individuals bring their own beliefs into the organization, and the organizational culture further fuels such beliefs to enhance internal alignment towards its goals (e.g. Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

## The Organization as Love, and Love as the Organization

As discussed above, Love has largely been avoided in the study of organizations, but we can still find its relevant traces in closely related constructs. Yet, what is missing in this tale is the organization itself, as an epistemic and social entity. In a letter to Valerya Aresenyev in November 1856, the Russian writer Lev Tolstoy wrote, 'One can live magnificently in this world if one knows how to work and how to love' (Troyat, 1967, p. 158; also in Hazan & Shaver, 1990, p. 270). Despite the importance of Eros, Philia and Agape, organizational research has tended to treat work and love largely as non-overlapping constructs, fuelling the 'myth of separate worlds' (Kanter, 1977). But does the organization as a collective phenomenon conceal love and its possibilities, or rather foreclose on the possibilities for love? Can we conceive the organization *as* love and love *as* the organization?

In his famous book *Working*, Terkel reports the vivid description of people who love their jobs. For example, a gravedigger said, 'How can I take it? They ask if I am calm when I bury people. If you stop and think, a funeral is one of the natural things in the world ... I enjoy it very much, especially in Summer' (Terkel, 1974, p. 661; also in Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). In a similar vein, the firefighter risks his own life because he is 'here for my community, a community I grew up in, a community where I know lots of people, a community that knows me' (in Grant, 2007, p. 393). According to Terkel (1974), the link between work and love is not the job itself, it is something else: 'I think most of us are looking for a *calling*, not a job. Most of us, like the assembly-line worker, have jobs that are too small for our spirit. Jobs are not big enough for people.'

Work encounters love in a search for meaning, in a calling that transcends the job itself and puts the person in contact with a bigger life purpose. This liaison between work and love relates not simply to a 'recognition of the skills and attributes associated with the quality of the job per se', but to a genuine belief in the 'positive attributes of the character whose identity the performers claim to inhabit: namely, those of love, generosity and care' (Hancock, 2016). That is why, for example, employees engaging in philanthropic emotion management when dealing with bereaved customers showed high personal satisfaction and contributed to organizational accomplishment (O'Donohoe & Turley, 2006). Or, in the case of a semi-professional Santa Claus performer, this is why the man expressed a recognition for his job that was incommensurate with the objective value of its economic and professional realization: 'I do it because I enjoy it ... It's to see the little ones' faces. I tell you, you cannot pay for that. You cannot pay for that' (Hancock, 2016, p. 472). Further research would look at the often-neglected processes accounting for whether and how people see their work, and their organizations, with and *as* love. Gordon Allport (1955) claimed, 'Love received and love given comprise the best form of therapy.' Does love help redefine the boundaries and the meaning of what we call 'work'?

The bonds between work and love become even more inextricable when the person conceives love *as* the organization. This is how founders often see their family firm. In a novel by the neo-realist Italian writer Giovanni Verga (1977 ed.), the old entrepreneur calls his business activity and property *la roba* (the 'things', or the 'stuff'). The assimilation of the organization with his own identity is so strong that, just before dying, he said, '*Roba mia, vientene con me!*' ('My things, follow me [in the grave]'). Romantic love and love for the firm are both kinds of a psychological 'attachment process' (the process of 'becoming attached'), experienced somewhat differently by distinct individuals because of their different personal and organizational histories (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Those emotional bonds tend to be stronger in family firms, considering the potential for greater love (but also hate) among family members. Emotional bonds often rise 'from the unconscious to consciousness', creating parallel work-related bonds that increase the sense of commitment of the family to the firm, but can also render more difficult interpreting and reacting to other family members' decisions and behaviours (Tagiuri & Davis, 1996). The role of such emotions can be particularly relevant in the context of intergenerational succession, a crucial event for the survival of family businesses. As described by the epistolary tale of an English pottery family firm from the 18th century, emotions can lead to 'paradoxes and ambiguities' that interweave with firms' strategies. The family firm is a 'site of powerful emotional experiences, processes, and settlements' (Holt & Popp, 2013, p. 905). The ability to manage the process of 'subjectivization' (Hancock & Tyler, 2001) of the firm's succession strategies into emotional and family bonds often makes the difference between successful business transfer across generations and the proverbial Buddenbrooks' decline (Mann, 1901).

Love can shape the way people ontologically define their organizational roles and the institutions themselves. This process can be ambivalent. Future research could explore how the faithful attachment to a firm, or an institution, can change a person's identity. Hannah Arendt (1963)

described for example how ideological blindness derailed individual consciences, ‘So that instead of saying: What horrible things I did to people! ... [they] would be able to say: What horrible things I had to watch in the pursuance of my duties, how heavily the task weighed upon my shoulders!’ In modern organizational life, we need to better understand the boundaries between commitment to our own duties and individual freedom of choice and action.

## Conclusion

The search for love helps us understand the intimate connections between subjectivity and alterity in organizational life. The avoidance of love pushed by the agenda of traditional organizational research conflicts with the acknowledgement of love-related constructs that is gradually emerging in studies of the organization. Love is important for organizations because it contributes to bringing the individual back into organizational research. Thus studying love also means investigating the ways in which individual people bring their own individuality, in terms of personality, cognition and emotions, to the workplace (cf. Burt, Kilduff, & Tasselli, 2013). The man empowered with love resembles the portrayal of Thomas More as ‘A man of an angel’s wit and singular learning... A man of marvelous mirth and pastimes, and sometime of a sad gravity. A man for all seasons’ (Whittinton, 1971).

This is the essential legacy of Love for organizations. People change in their identity when triggered by love, and as their behaviour changes, the organization can change too. Neglecting love in the study of organization substantially means neglecting the dynamic realization of people’s individualities at work. Conversely, acknowledging love calls for an introspective analysis of people’s and organizational work-life; love asks for a continuous and authentic realization of the self, in relation to the other, in the organization.

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