

## Love and Play: Are They the Same?

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**Abstract:** A Swedish word for love, “*kär-lek [love-play]*” gave an impetus for this article that aims at defining two mysterious and fascinating phenomena: love and play. They are analogous by many of their features. It is difficult to define them comprehensively and they both develop individually and in stages. Furthermore, as we tried to create an overall picture about these phenomena, we found many combining questions: where does love/play start and to what extent imagination maintains both these phenomena? Both love and play involves joy and pleasure but also insecurity and risks. Or do they both consist merely of work, learning, and practicing? People’s ability to play and love does not disappear with age. Is love thus play and play love?

**Key words:** Feeling, learning, love, play

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### INTRODUCTION

A Swedish word for the noun ‘love’, ‘*kärlek*’, consists of two parts: ‘*kär*’ that means the adjective ‘dear’ or ‘loved’ in English and ‘*lek*’ that means the noun ‘play’. This word inspired us to write this article: all that people become interested in or inspired about and like can turn into love or play. However, this article does not go to town on semantics any further but discusses the interesting combination of love and play: how could these two concepts be addressed, what they do have in common, and how do they differ from each other—or do they?

According to German Phenomenologist Scheler (1954), a human being is not just an intellectual, knowing, and desirous creature but emotional and loving before anything (Scheler, 1954). People do what they like and love. Furthermore, love has its various forms: in addition to romantic love (Hatfield, 1988; Fenchel, 2005; Määttä, 2005a, 2006; Hegi and Bergner, 2010), there is love for fellow humans (Paldanius and Määttä, 2011), mother’s and father’s love, the love of one’s country (Määttä, 2006), and pedagogical love (Määttä and Uusiautti, 2011). Love has many faces. All these forms of love are valuable but also threatened in the modern era of individualism and self-centered projects (Beck-Gernsheim and Beck, 1995). Similarly, the traditional play when considered as pleasure-oriented action without intention to gain but which is valuable and important for development and learning as such is about to disappear in the more and more technical world (Johnson *et al.*, 2005).

However, there is not just one theory of play but several definitions and perspectives (Rogers and Sawyers, 1988; Fromberg, 2002). There is a variety of play types: for example, Piaget (1951/1999) mentions practicing, symbol, rule, and role plays; Williams *et al.* (2001) the different forms of functional plays; Caillois (2001) distinguishes *agon* (competition-based play), *alea* (chance- and luck-based play), *mimicry* (imitation-based play), and *ilinx* (physical achievement-based play); and Scarlett *et al.* (2005) separate the forms of harmful play.

Despite the various illustrations of play, it is something mysterious, inexplicable, and beyond all mundane like love is (Fenchel, 2005; Hegi and Bergner, 2010). Freud’s coeval, Finck, ended up stating that “you may say almost anything about love and you are presumably always right” (Freud, 1959, p. 64). All in all, just like love, also play is extremely multiform phenomenon. Play covers a great deal of a child’s world and colors children’s all activities (Scarlett, 2005; Brown, 2009). According to Kuhfuss (1996), a child is play at his/her purest and play cannot be explained by anything else or anything smaller. Play is its own category just like love, death, joy, or sorrow. Everything is significant, great, miraculous, and shiny both in passionate play (Lindon, 2001) and love (Gordon, 2008; Pines, 1999).

**Both play and love have many common features and questions:** Where do love and play begin? What do they require to be successful? What is their significance? And how could people’s ability to love and play be enhanced? In this article, we will discuss these questions in a light of

previous studies and thus pursue demystifying the puzzling and intriguing combination of play and love.

**Problematic to define-impossible to research:** It is impossible to define extensively what love or play are or are not. Is it thus possible to study these phenomena at all? Peck (1978) argues, that when studying love, we play with a mystery that is too extensive or profound to be explained by words. The research on play has also been regarded as suspicious. The words seem too dull or ordinary when compared with the omnipotence of love or play. A child's ability to put play into words is difficult or unnecessary (Vygotsky, 1986).

However, people have played and loved across the years. Even for this reason, it is hard to believe that part of the core contents of people's life could not be addressed with research as well-by trying to reveal, describe, analyze, and explain these phenomena. Yet, many big questions lack answers.

**Is studying love comparable to play, then?** On the other hand, Soini (1997) has noted that despite its sweet essence, play is a ground that is extremely difficult to study. If a research aims at discovering conformities to law, it has to be stated that it is impossible to find any common conformities to law in the phenomena of play and love as they have as many definitions as they are people who experience them. Everyone loves and plays but in their own way.

In addition, there is not just one right way to love or play but their forms and types vary. This fact is illustrated for example by Lee (1973) famous love typology: he used his typology to analyze the styles of loving through the analogy of the colors of a rainbow. Lee distinguishes six ways of falling in love three of which (*eros, ludus, and storge*) are the primary and three (*mania, pragma, and agape*) secondary ways of falling in love. Several various combinations are located between these dimensions.

It is important that people's ways of finding functional tacks and solutions are described and demystified by research (Gudmundsdottir, 1996; Kuusela, 2003; Magnusson and Mahoney, 2006). Similarly, it is important to study all that people end up with and achieve in love and play.

**Where do play and love begin?** Where love begins (Pines, 1999) or when is the right time to play (Manning-Morton and Thorp, 2003), ask researchers. Vygotsky (1967) thought that play originates in a child's needs and desires and the task of play is to fulfill these wishes. Also love is based on many kinds of needs and hopes. A human being can seek love in order to fulfill his/her unsatisfied hopes (Murray *et al.*, 1996). According to Reik (1957), the motive for the birth of love is an individual's dissatisfaction with oneself, inner insecurity, and the

feeling of not being capable of meeting the demands that wells from one's heart of hearts. Love seems to satisfy these needs by extending an individual's self. The need to be loved is a human being's basic need.

If play or love is ignited, how does it last and remain pleasant and positive? Like educators, also researchers have studied the continuity of play (Cole-Hamilton, 2006), how it is ignited (Bonel and Lindon, 2000; Davy and Gallagher, 2006), as well as the impediment to it and its risks (Green and Hart, 1998; Kangas, 2010). Likewise, researchers have tried to find out the secrets of the tenability of love (Sternberg, 1998; Määttä, 2005a; Canary and Dainton, 2006; Dindia and Emmers-Sommer, 2006).

**Are they both just imagination?** Love and play create their own reality because they both require imagination. Although other people and activities are real in love there are plenty of fantasies and false reality. Even in love, there is a phase when it does not appear how the eyes see it but how the mind experiences it. A human being constructs love to fit his/her hopes and ideals. Watzslavik *et al.* (1974), for their part, describe love as "a syndrome of utopia", which appears as a tendency to see love as a solution to everything although there is not any solution really. In love, one lives in a fallacy of unrealistic fantasies. Or is this actually the fascination of love: to strive for perfection that does not exist but in which one believes so deeply that one is ready to struggle over obstacles and seek something greater and more complete?

The utterance "Love is the victory of the imagination over the brain" (May, 1969) illustrates the power of imagination in love; whereas the interconnectedness between play and imagination is highlighted by Brown (2009) finding "how it shapes the brain, opens the imagination, and invigorates the soul".

A child creates when playing and there is no play without imagination (Lieberman, 1977; Russ, 2003; Egan, 2005; Paley, 2005). A child can do anything in play, says Vygotsky (1967). Piaget (1951/1999), for his part, considers play as an action that satisfies a child's ego by changing the reality according to the child's hopes. When playing, a child can solve the conflicts between wishes and reality (Helenius, 1993).

**Joy and positivity:** Creativity and love relate to humor and playfulness. The experiences of realization and joking both exemplifies the ability to free one's mind and soul. Curiosity, unchained creation, and spontaneity are peculiar to a child. They are also the sources of play and love. Nevertheless, dreaming, being childlike and unconventional and whimsy are often shut out in the "mature" adulthood. According to Dewey (1991/1910), the balance between playfulness and sobriety is the ideal of intellectuality.

As the mentioned Swedish word for love shows, love consists of love plays in which the playful behavior, being silly, and joyfulness bring laughter and delight to the life together. Love and playfulness belong together. Morris (1967) defines the play and the attempt on the play as a voyage of exploration that enhances “the atmosphere of wonder and curiosity; will to search and find and experiment”. In this way, play and playfulness can be connected to love and joy as well as to the delight of wonder and discovering something new.

From this point of view, also the playful behavior of those who are in love frees themselves to find the new characteristics from themselves and from other people; and at the same time, the charm of novelty and power of the feeling of falling in love strengthens. Nor do laughter and being silly, coddling and love plays-the behavioral manners that are regressed into the infancy expressed with the language of psychoanalysts-show any signs of subsiding even later in life. The seniors talk about getting younger when falling in love: how they would go to the chaplaincy’s garden to steal some apples at the age of 80 and to eat ice cream sitting on the escalator of a shopping center. “We were marveling ourselves how we became such the malicious brats”, “one has to preen oneself as one was a young girl”, “I am laughing with him all the time”, or “I, a taciturn, straight-faced man, find myself laughing and chortling and putting the bad things in the background” (Määttä, 2005b). There are numerous examples of the fact how the age does not bleach the joy and playfulness of love. The age is forgotten: they just are and enjoy being spreading joy to everyone.

When Spinoza (1994/1677) sketched the illustration of a wise and rational life, he emphasized the meaning of love, joy, and happiness. They stand for growing perfection whereas hate, fear, and disregard mean diminishing perfection. Greenfield (2004) writes about the pleasure that play produces. On the other hand, both play and love include insecurity and power as well. Among others, Myck-Wayne (2010) and Dunn and Hughes (2001) write about the connection of these elements. Love can have a repressive, clinging, obsessive, or smothering nature similar to addiction (Schaeffer, 1987; Capell-Sowder, 1994).

Every now and then, love and play enter an unfamiliar ground and they involve jumps in the unknown and risks. There are studies about the risks of play (Green and Hart, 1998; Little and Wyver, 2008) and love (Fohrenbach and Lane, 1994) and both play (Little and Eager, 2010) and love (Fenchel, 1998) demand courage as well. However, it could be noted that without these elements, love and play would not involve learning.

**Learning and practicing:** Play requires also practicing and learning (Reynolds and Jones, 1997). Likewise, falling in love can be seen as a learning experience

(Määttä, 2010). Therefore, both play and love mean testing the new boundaries and from this point of view, they consist of despair, disillusion, and anxiety, too (Bergman, 1995). It is not easy to learn new or acquire new skills.

Play and practicing it prepares and provides means to many other developmental areas as well: for example, learning to read (Zigler *et al.*, 2004), physical and motoric development (Johnson *et al.*, 2005; Awartini *et al.*, 2008), cognitive development (Livingstone, 2006), creativity (Craft, 2005; Jeffrey and Craft, 2006), and social development (Reynolds and Jones, 1997; Slade, 1995). Success in love, on the other hand, reflects in a human being’s wellbeing and coping diversely (Uusiautti and Määttä, 2010a, b).

**Developmental stages:** A variety of developmental stages can be named in love and play. For example, a test series of love describes how a relationship develops through various tests and experiments (Määttä, 2006) and a sort of filtering takes place as illustrated by a filter theory (Kerckhoff and Davis, 1962). The developmental stages have been described as proceeding from the stimulus stage and through the value stage to the role stage (Murstein, 1976).

The illustration of the developmental stages of play created by Piaget (1951/1999) could describe love as well. Then, individuals progress from practicing games into symbol and rule games. On the other hand, the rule games do include interesting games that occur in love as well: there are traditional games which individuals try to break away from but which still hold on persistently both in the world of play (Kalliala, 1999) and love. In addition, there are linguistic games, hide-and-seek games, leg-pulling, and role playing games and drama games in creative playing—and again, all these appear in love and play.

Love and play thus require practicing, learning, and moving from one developmental stage to another. Are love and creativity, such as learning is, both merely working, after all? A love affair will not last automatically but it requires activeness, creativity, and sensitivity like any other success. For example, Montessori (1984) has stated that play is a child’s work, preparing for adulthood, and adjusting to the society (Paley, 2005). Although this thought of considering play as work has not been supported widely, it is justified to conclude that love and play require-besides feelings-knowledge and skill. A human being can develop his/her ability to play or love, learn them.

**Love is Play and Play is Love?** Freud’s (1959) definition of human sanity as the ability to love and work could be expanded by adding the ability to play in it. Every human being and society need love in order to stay healthy. Similarly, the value of play, imagination, and creativity is

priceless (Slade, 1995). Healthy development is not possible without love or various forms of joint playing and practicing. Love and play both represent new paths to the richness of existence for human beings. With them, people grow, develop, become more-strengthen the unused resources-are capable of doing more and better. Indeed, Fromm (1956) considers love as an active power and Vygotsky (1978) play as action where a child is head and shoulders above himself/herself. Erikson (1968) says how love advances the harmony of personality and how appreciation, recognition, approval, and admiration received from others evoke the strengthening of one's own self and self-respect.

Love and play are not conditional of age. The ability to love and create is part of a human being even later in life. Both love and creativity satisfy our deepest emotional needs regardless of age and are irreplaceable to the emotional and intellectual balance in this busy, performance-centered, and competitive culture of ours. (Simonton, 1989.) Play and love are connected to people's wellbeing (Konu *et al.*, 2002), and while there are certain continuities in (children's) play, it also varies with demographic, ideological, cultural, and socio-economic circumstances (Mintz, 2010). Nevertheless, a child's love can be quite devoted and an adult's ability to play does not disappear (Cole-Hamilton, 2006). When a human being plays or loves with his/her body and soul, he/she does not remember his/her age or place.

**So, is love play and play love?** Yes! A child who lives in deprived conditions does not play nor can one who is left without love play (Stone *et al.*, 1990). Love, on the other hand, makes people flirt, fool, and use their imagination (Määttä, 2006). However, love is not just a game. It is equally serious and important to all of us, equally bruising, touching, and developing, enriching and opening emotional and learning experience-just like play is.

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