

Self-Love

Part 3 of 4

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1. Intro

Third in series – first two

last one, self-fulfillment in June

not linear in sense that once you achieve one level, then leads to the next one

have to revisit all these steps periodically, but there is something of a progression

2. Self-love v. self-acceptance

how is self-acceptance different from self-love?

some would say the same thing but useful to distinguish

restaurant example

As Carl Rogers wrote, a patient moving toward self-actualization goes beyond self-acceptance: “The client not only accepts himself – a phrase which may carry the connotation of a grudging and reluctant acceptance of the inevitable – he actually comes to like himself. This is not a bragging or self-assertive liking; it is rather a quiet pleasure in being one’s self.”¹

So, how do we get to that point? Focus for today

3. Potential conflicts

We may be uncomfortable with term self-love, sounds like narcissism

Can’t have too much self-love in the way I am using the term

Challenge is loving ourselves fully without limiting our ability to love others

It’s important to see that there is no inherent conflict with loving ourselves and loving others

Just as there cannot be too much self-love, there cannot be too much love for others, at least in the way I am using term

¹ On Becoming a Person, p. 87.

But there are potential conflicts we should think about

First, there is the possibility, not of loving our selves too much, but of becoming too self-centered, even self-obsessed

Second, on the other side, there is the possibility, not of loving others too much, but of ignoring our own interests and going too far in the direction of self-sacrifice

The challenge is to love ourselves fully without becoming too self-obsessed, and at the same time, love others but not become so overwhelmed with self-sacrifice that we undermine our own happiness

Talk about those conflicts in a few moments

Goal is to expand our capacity to love ourselves and love others at the same time

4. Diagram

First, go over diagram

1 – extreme cases, mental illness

2 – concern about self-obsession

3 – not clear if it is possible to genuinely love others without loving ourselves

Erich Fromm, Art of Loving:

*The affirmation of one's own life, happiness, growth, freedom is rooted in one's capacity to love, i.e., in care, respect, responsibility, and knowledge. If an individual is able to love productively, he loves himself, too; if he can love *only* others, he cannot love at all.*

but certainly possible to put other people's interests ahead of our own too much

most of us in position 4 – with some limitations on our ability to love ourselves and loves others

Goal is to move toward position 5 – loving ourselves fully and expanding our love for others at that same time

5. Reciprocal relationship between self-love and love for others

Is there a tradeoff in loving ourselves v. loving others?

No, in fact, there is a reciprocal relationship, they reinforce each other

First, how does love for others strengthen our love for ourselves?

1. it makes us feel better about ourselves

Examples of doing things for others, children, parents, friends

2. it reminds us that humans are flawed creatures, so we are more forgiving of our own flaws; we become committed to the idea of loving all humanity, which includes ourselves

Erich Fromm, in the *Art of Loving*, wrote:

To love somebody is the actualization and concentration of the power to love. The basic affirmation contained in love is directed toward the beloved person as an incarnation of essentially human qualities. Love of one person implies love of man as such...From this it follows that my own self must be as much as object of my love as another person.

These “essentially human qualities” include our imperfections and weaknesses

3. finally, even though there are no guarantees, loving others usually means they love us back, and there is no greater source of happiness and feeling good about ourselves, than the love of our family, our friends

Not a big believer in Karma, but recall the Beatles line, “the love you take is equal to the love you make”

There is something to that

6. Self-love and self-obsession

Let's go back to potential conflicts I mentioned earlier

First, the conflict between self-love and self-indulgence, or even self-obsession

There is a healthy level of self-centeredness, which I will talk about in a moment

But demanding that we be the center of attention or that we constantly receive praise or that we win every game, that is way beyond a healthy level of centeredness

This has nothing to do with self-love.

More likely it is a struggle with a lack of self-awareness and self-acceptance

Now, for a while you may find people do allow you to be the center of attention to praise you lavishly

There will be people around who are sycophants, particularly if you are rich or powerful

You come to expect that praise and then you come to need it

Trump is the most glaring example

But the praise of the sycophants is not genuine because they have their own agenda

Recall the legend of Narcissus

Narcissus really was beautiful and often there is a reality, something to admire about yourself, that is the original basis of self-obsession

But Narcissus could not pull himself away from his reflection,

He lost the love of a beautiful woman, Echo, and ended up committing suicide

But the lesson of Narcissus is that you end up destroying yourself

7. Loving others and self-sacrifice

The other conflict has to do with the balance between self-centeredness and self-sacrifice

We all engage in self-sacrifice to one degree or another

Most parents have stayed up all night with a sick child

We have given up a Saturday afternoon to help someone or visit a friend in the hospital

Some people spend much of their lives volunteering for one activity or another or helping their children or parents

At some point, everyone says at least to themselves, what about me?

Self-love means recognizing the “me” and tending to it. It means making room in your life for self-centeredness.

Like the term “self love,” people may recoil at the term “self-centeredness”

I don’t think that makes sense, but it is question of degree, of balance

At a minor level, that means spending money on yourself sometimes or taking the afternoon off to pamper yourself.

saying what restaurant you want the group to go to or what movie to see

speaking up for yourself and insisting that your views be heard

a more important level, it means insisting on being treated fairly and lovingly in a relationship.

telling your partner you do not want to be taken for granted.

telling a friend that she is damaging your relationship if she continues to criticize you or your loved ones unfairly

getting out of a destructive relationship if it does not meet your needs
there is no conflict between this kind of self-centeredness and genuine love for others

8. Finding the right balance

How do you resolve these conflicts? How do you find the right balance?

It's not easy. If it were, everybody would be at position 5 on our diagram.

But, I think a big step is deciding what kind of person you want to be.

That means constructing your higher self, deciding what virtues you want that person to have

It becomes a default guide when you need direction about how to feel and how to act

It's not going to work if you speed through life, acting out the same pattern day after day

Reflect on your higher self, the image you have of that person.

Take time for both long term-reflection and in the moment reflection

If you are drifting too far toward self-obsession, position 3 in our diagram, you are drifting away from the person you want to be, you are not living in your higher self

If you are drifting too far toward self-sacrifice, e.g., position 2, if the answer to every demand on your time is in the direction of self-sacrifice, then you need to rethink the values that led you to envision a higher self who always puts himself last.

Most of all, think of ways to move to position 5, by expanding the love for yourself and for others

9. Conclusion

Close by saying again that it is possible to love ourselves more without slipping into narcissism

It is possible to love others more without losing track of our own interests

And not only is it possible, it is the key to self-fulfillment, which I will talk about next time

Close with the quote from the Buddha in the order of service

You deserve your love as much as anyone.