

How to Learn to Love – How to Guide the Young to Love?

Kaarina Määttä

University of Lapland, Rovaniemi, Finland

Abstract:

Many young people find love and falling in love interesting and they touch the youngsters' lives: love fascinates, confuses, and hurts; yet, the young dream of it. For a young person, falling in love can mean an extremely powerful emotional experience which enraptures and hurts.

Creating and upholding human relationships is not easy and social skills develop along with life experiences. Even falling in love is a learning experience. But how could the ability of falling in love be taught? This article discusses what the parents' and adults' role is in supporting the young in their intimate relationships.

Keywords: *falling in love, adolescence, youngsters, social education, loving, love*

Introduction

Already before puberty, the young wonder about the secrets of love: How does love feel like? Who is the right for me? And will I become beloved? They dream of love but it also confuses. Today's youngsters' unreasonable expectations towards love appear as their belief that love is an answer and solution to almost all problems [47] [59]. In addition, love is considered as the most important source for personal coping and pleasure because the young seem to expect that love offers the perfect pleasure by healing and making things easier, removing all the obstacles to happiness including their own weaknesses. The higher expectations are, the greater are the disappointments [7]. Dreams can turn into a trap if they consist of unrealistic hopes. Instead of making life easier, love can actually hurt. How could the young be supported when they try to create permanent intimate relationships?

After having started a research project in the field of love psychology in the University of Lapland, Finland, I wrote based on this project altogether eight studies about the fascination and painfulness of love and falling in love [45] [46] [47]. 55 under 25-year-old young participated in this research, who on the one hand talked about the happiness of falling in love and, on the other hand, about the pain and crises it causes.

The Phenomenon of Falling in Love

Several phases of falling in love have been specified [14] [29] [30] [34] [57], as the power of falling in love as an emotional experience has been comprehensively studied [1] [21] [52] [54]. My own research showed how falling in love can be a powerful emotional whirlwind that causes a temporary, yet fascinating metamorphosis. This kind of metamorphosis enthuses in three ways when falling in love:

- 1) The one in love sees the surrounding reality as ennobled, people seem friendlier, and all the voices sound more melodious. [44]
- 2) Similarly, the partner is seen with admiration through the rose-tinted glasses: his/her Positive features are emphasized and the negative ones are ignored. "Looking with the eyes of love the pockmarks seem dimples", says a proverb. [42]
- 3) Self-respect of the one in love increases. The appreciative words one get with love proves that one is worth loving and all this appears as contentment and happiness. This is how the one in love feels of becoming physically and mentally more appealing and makes one beaming. Being loved by the other gives strength and meaning for one's existence. Thus, love can be experienced as a sort of magical mirror that reflects one as good and beautiful. [5] [26] [35].

Despite it being enchanting, the early phase of falling in love is temporal and no one can avoid crises or changes. When life becomes back to normal, the new kinds of expectations are aimed at

the partner. "Love is rough and enchantment is cruel making one die with one's boots on and eyes left open", says a Finnish proverb. There are more and more studies about the crises, touchstones, and pitfalls that come along with the process of falling in love. Bergman (1995) and Gordon (2008) talk about "the dark sides" of falling in love, jealousy, possessiveness and excessive dependency [4], Peele (1988), for her part, refers to "lovesickness". Since the 1980s, a numerous amount of guides for the difficulties of love especially for women and to overpass an excessive dependency that have become bestseller have written in Western world [15] [17] [49].

The crisis that occurs along the process of falling in love involves many kinds of experiences and feelings of disappointment, helplessness, and insecurity [8] [28]. I have categorized into four themes the problems that came up from the interviews and essays written by the research subjects:

- 1) The difficulty of facing and accepting the unillusioned reality [22]
- 2) The paradox of being alone and together [20], [51] [56]
- 3) Balancing between separateness and proximity [40]
- 4) Love addiction and dependency [13] [55]
- 5) The difficulty of one's own autonomy, loneliness, and individuality [22] [56] [47]

The aim of this article

The praise for love can be high. Still the human and love relationships are the fundamental power of life and giving meaning for life. But could the ability to love be taught? Surely, the experiences of love are educative as such; but how the children and the young could be protected by rearing from too painful phases and how could the maturing youngsters' ability to love be enhanced? Love brings the biggest joy and fascinates and one should be able to enjoy it but it would also be important that the young would learn to know that love is not just happiness nor does it even guarantee it. Next I will discuss some perspectives on the role of upbringing and adults when understanding and supporting the young love.

Some Perspectives on Rearing

Upbringing provides people with the readiness to nourish human relationships and, similarly, the experiences gained from relationships function as sources for self-development. Parents give an example for the young how to nurture human relationships and the ability to love. A devoted relationship between the parents and a child [11] is the basic component of human behavioral repertoire and creates the ability to love [19]. By the parents' caring they learn both to seek conform and trust and to explore the world – to work, play, discover, create [25].

Feeney and Van Vleet (2010) point out, how secure base concept provides an important theoretical basis for understanding, how people can grow as a result of being attached to someone.

The rearing adults and teachers should support the young in creating intimate relationships but what it comes to love, adults' expertise may be questioned by the young people. Falling in love and infatuation are phenomena that can make the young dramatically change both in relation to the parents and to school work. Educators should be aware of it.

The Different Rearing of Girls and Boys

Girls and boys have different kind of preparedness to dating [18] [47]. Certainly, the manners of falling in love vary by individuals and everyone loves by their own way [2] [36], but by rearing girls and boys get different kinds of stimuli for emotional processing [12] [39] [43]. Still, youngsters' ability to show attachment varies. Nor is it is not easy to regulate emotions [2].

Girls start the so called would-you-play-with-me negotiations already at kindergarten and seek their way to the company of the best friend. They discuss things even with their moms. Therefore, girls learn about intimacy and practice sharing their deepest and most intimate emotional experiences and paying attention to the other. Their verbal and social skills develop. At the same time, their sensibility to notice others' hopes and expectations strengthens. [38]

Instead, boys hang out in large groups and do everything exciting. The competitiveness and trials of strength are part of boys' growing environment. Instead of talking, they do things. Even with dad, they prefer going to watch a soccer game or playing pc-games leaving not much space for talking or figuring out their feelings.

Therefore, girls and boys enter the dating age with different kind of readiness: usually, girls have learnt emotional regulation, expression, and interpretation better than boys have. [9] [10]

Although girls have good emotional skills, falling in love appears as a strong desire to adjust among many young girls. They might give up other friends, hobbies, and many things important to them just to please their boyfriends. Tästä ilmiöstä Dorothy Tennov (1979) käyttää nimitystä limerence. Girls become sensitive in every way in order to please their loved ones. A boyfriend's love seems to be enough for them and thus, at its worst, they sacrifice their own personality and interests in the name of love. In adulthood, this kind of love can turn into a dependency, become addiction or codependency by nature. [13] [28] [50] [55]

For boys, losing love can be an insuperable experience. The very first love can be fascinating for the young men because of all the intimate experiences it provides to them. The feeling that you can get close to the other, talk and open up, and become heard can become especially significant. [6] [16], [21] [51] [52] [54]. Therefore, the crises and disappointments after having fallen in love or losing the loved one can feel extremely painful. One young man blamed himself by stating that *"this has happened only to me"* or *"there is something wrong with me"*. There can be too many demands on one's self-esteem. Broken dreams and disappointments in love are one reason for the suicides committed by young Finnish men [31] [60]. The problems tend to culminate because men do not discuss the trouble that love involves; boys do not talk about these matters, nor are they ventilated by the models provided by show business.

How does Falling in Love affect the Young People's Schoolwork and Studies?

Falling in love affects school going and studying like a two-edged sword. On the one hand, falling in love may disturb concentration and limit the time used in doing the learning tasks. School or studying may appear irrelevant or ordinary and dull compared with the flush of falling in love. Daydreaming, the flush of love, the emotional whirlpool of pleasure, swinging moods as well as the fear and insecurity of losing love [51] go round and round in the mind and thus, can disturb studying, school work, and hobbies.

On the other hand, falling in love can also enhance studying, fire and inspire. The young can discover new abilities and possibilities to express themselves. The self-image of the one in love is usually strong; falling in love as such gives strength and a feeling that one is better, stronger, and more dignified than before [5]. Being beloved makes one satisfied and appreciate oneself and that reflects in one's presence and behavior [35].

Young people can achieve things in schoolwork, studying, and hobbies that they could not achieve without their loved one's existence. They can rise to the challenges more courageously than before; but they can also channel their interest in a direction that can disturb studying.

School work and studying demand always efforts and bother in order to be able to enjoy the results. How well prepared the young are to this toil and persistent action depends on the fact to what extent they have thought about their future, goals for life, and the means to achieving them. To be able to make the right choices and achieve the dreams, the young need adults who listen to and care for them [32].

Adults Should Take the Youngsters' Love Seriously

An adults' task is to support the young both at the moment of the flush of love and disappointments and crises [48]. This necessitates that an adult knows and realizes what falling in love is about. The young are going through a tender developmental phase in their emotional life. They may trust headlong in their emotions without being able to listen to the advice or warnings. Nor could any adult be the highest or self-justified authority in love as the experience of love is personal to

everyone. As an emotional phenomenon, falling in love is located between the experiences of extreme pleasure and the deepest distress and disappointments – in a way that the young have not experienced before [33].

Falling in love is also a learning experience for the young people [23]. When dating and falling in love they search, test, and assess themselves and others. They learn about their inner reality, those things that please them and hurt them. At the same time, they increase their awareness and understanding not only about the separateness between their own and others' feelings and expectations but also about the dissimilarity between them. In this way, falling in love is often a climax in life, a certain turn of events, or border crossing where life and one's own self are formed in a new way.

Adults need a certain kind of alertness and sensitivity [18] [27]. They cannot impose their own advice on the young people at the phase in which they are likely to shut their ears and refuse dumping their own solid truths. They can be helped only if they are willing to receive help. Even if adults saw the harrowing and destroying nature of love, they have to be able to time the way and time of their support at a moment when the young are ready to think over their own situation [24].

The knowledge about the phases of a dating process and its many-sidedness is of primary importance to the educators [37]. Their own experiences are not enough: the validity of these experiences should indeed be pondered through their experiences of life. No one can name themselves as the experts of love.

Obviously, one would like to see the young to adapt and receive information about the nature of falling in love before their own experience to prepare them for all the fascinating and painful experiences. These things should be discussed in a satisfactory multi-dimensional manner and distributing information should not be only the school's responsibility [53]. Youth work and church work with confirmation classes could share the information to the young. Nor is this information sharing late in early adulthood, for example during military service.

Adults should let the young enjoy and be happy of what life and love can offer at their best. When problems and crises occur, they should not be ignored, undermined, or nullified believing that things will go well with time. The disappointments that love brings can incur quite severe and tragic consequences.

Adults can help the young to foresee the crises; they can assure the young that love is not easy and problems and conflicts belong to emotional human relationships. If dating ends, the young have learnt something about themselves. For the one who lives in balance with one self life can offer many opportunities for satisfaction. In order to be capable of controlling their personal life, the young have to be supported in discovering their own field of competencies, their own separateness, and their own goals. At its best, love is a resource but the keys of happiness cannot be found in others' pockets. What people think of themselves, directs their life.

Adults Should Encourage Youngsters to Learn Self-Appreciation

Learning to appreciate the self can be the way to cherish human relationships. To be able to love the other, one has to love oneself as well. The ability to love requires that one accepts one's own self and uniqueness. Then, a human being can achieve his/her own separateness: he/she knows what he/she wants, feels, and thinks; holds on to his/her words, promises, and actions; is able to appreciate his/her own decisions and to defend them; and does not always demand protection, caring, and love. Attaining this kind of autonomy requires one leaving the childhood years behind and breaking out of the child's role and dependency

On the other hand, Rollo May (1969) has noted that love is the paradox that means very powerful self-consciousness and assimilation with the beloved one. One can love the other only in relation with the degree of one's own independency. Only those who can live according to their own expectations are able to love in a genuine way.

In this sense, love is a space where the priority is merely on the relationship with the self than with the other. With well-developed self-appreciation, one can respect the other's dissimilarity and

individuality as well. When loving oneself, one can accept not only one's own good and bad sides but a partner's as well – and will not expect the partner to be perfect either.

How can people learn to accept themselves, learn to respect themselves from their without asking for evidence from others? Instead of saddling the others with one's own responsibility of satisfaction and happiness, one should be able to see one's own share and responsibility in love.

Self-appreciation is enhanced by learning to enjoy one's own success and achievements instead of clinging to others. Every youngster has their own fields of expertise and competencies as well as numerous things making their life satisfying and rich. Studying, work, friends, recreation, and relaxation in the midst of various hobbies, artistic and operational activities provide the young with opportunities to succeed and contents for life. With many fields of interest and know-how as well as sources for satisfaction, one understands better that love is not the answer to everything and thus, does not expect non-stop proof or guarantees from love.

References

1. Alberoni, F. (1979). *Falling in Love and Loving*. Milano: Garzanti.
2. Allen, J.P. (2008). The Attachment System in Adolescence. In J. Cassidy, & P.R. Shaver (Eds.), *Handbook of Attachment: Theory, Research, and Clinical Applications* (pp. 419-435). New York: Guilford Press.
3. Allen, J.P., & Miga, E.M. (2010). Attachment in Adolescence: A Move to the Level of Emotiona Regulation. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 27, 181-190.
4. Altman, I., Vinsel, A., & Brown, B. (1973). Dialectic Conceptions in Social Psychology: An Application to Social Penetration and Privacy Regulation. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 14, 108-160.
5. Aron, A., Paris, M., & Aron, E. (1995). Falling in love: Prospective Studies of Self-Concept Change. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69, 102-112.
6. Bauminger, N., Finzi-Dottan, R., Chason, S., & Har-Even, D. (2008). Intimacy in Adolescent Friendship: The Roles of Attachment, Coherence, and Self-Disclosure. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 25, 3, 409-428.
7. Beck-Gernsheim, E. & Beck, U. (1995). *The Normal Chaos of Love*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
8. Bergman, M. (1995). On Love and Its Enemies. *Psychoanalytic Review*, 82, 1-19.
9. Berndt, T.J., & Hanna, H.A. (1995). Intimacy and Self-Disclosure in Friendships. In K. J. Rotenberg (Ed.) *Disclosure Processes in Children and Adolescents* (pp. 57-77). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
10. Booth-Laforce, C. , Oh, W., Hayoung, K.A., Rubin, K.H., Rosen-Krasnor, L., Burgess, K. (2006). Attachment, Self-Worth, and Peer-Group Functioning in Middle Childhood. *Attachment and Human Development*, 84, 4, 309-325.
11. Bowlby, J. (1988). *A Secure Base*. New York: Basic Books.
12. Camarena, P.M., Sarigiani, P. A., & Peterson, A.C. (1990). Gender-Specific Pathways to Intimacy in Early Adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 19, 1, 19-32.
13. Capell-Sowder, K. (1994). On Being Addicted to the Addict: Co-Dependent Relationships. In J. Woititz (Ed.) *Co-Dependency, An Emerging Issue* (pp. 5-30). Hollywood, FL: Health Communications.
14. Coleman, S. (1977). A Developmental Stage Hypotheses for Nonmarital Dyadic Relationships. *Journal of Marriage and Family Counselling*, 3, 71-76.
15. Cowan, C, & Kinder, M. (1985). *Smart Women/Foolish Choices*. New York: Clarkson N. Potter.
16. Dindia, K., & Emmers-Sommer, T.M. (2006). What Partners Do to Maintain Their Close Relationships. In P. Noller & J.A. Feeney (Eds.) *Close Relationships: Functions, Forms and Processes* (pp. 305-324). New York: Psychology Press.

17. Dowling, C. (1981). *The Cinderella Complex: Women's Hidden Fear of Independence*. New York: Pocket Books.
18. Dubbs, S., & Buunk, A.P. (2010). Sex Differences in Parental Preferences over A Child's Mate Choice: A Daughter's Perspective. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 27, 8, 1051-1059.
19. Feenye, B.C., & Van Vleet, M. (2010). Growing through Attachment: The Interplay of Attachment and Exploration in Adulthood. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 27,2, 226-234.
20. Fenchel, G.H. (1998). Exquisite Intimacy – Dangerous Love. *Issues in Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 20, 1, 17-27.
21. Fenchel, G.H. (2005). What is Love? *Issues in Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 27, 1, 49-67.
22. Foehrenbach, L.M. & Lane, R.C. (1994). An Object Relational Approach to Resistance: The Use of Aggression as a Barrier to Love. *Psychotherapy in Private Practice*, 13, 3, 23-42.
23. Fonagy, P., Gergely, G., Jurist, E.L., & Target, M. (2002). *Affect Regulation, Mentalization and The Development of the Self*. New York: Other Press.
24. Freeman, H., Brown, B. (2001). Primary Attachment to Parents and Peer during Adolescence: Differences by Attachment Style. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 30, 653-674.
25. Freney, B.C., & Trush, R.L. (2010). Relationship Influences on Exploration in Adulthood. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 98, 5-7.
26. Freud, S. (1914/1957). On Narcissim. An Introduction. In Standard Edition. Part XIV (pp. 73-102). London: Hogarth Press.
27. Gordon R.M. (1998). The Medea Complex and the Parental Alienation Syndrome: When Mothers Damage their Daughter's Ability to Love a Man. In G. Fenchel (Ed.), *The Mother-Daughter Relationships Echoes through Time*. (pp. 38-56). Nortvale, N.j.: Jason Aronson.
28. Gordon, R.M. (2008). *I Love You Madly: On Passion, Personality, and Personal Growth*. New York: IAPT Press.
29. Hatfield, E. (1988) Passionate and Companionate Love. In R. Sternberg, & M. Barnes (Eds.) *The Psychology of Love* (pp. 191-217). New Haven: Yale University Press.
30. Hegi, K. E. & Bergner, R.M. (2010). What is Love? An Empirically-Based Essentialist Account. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, August, 27, 620-636.
31. Horesh, N., & Apter, A. (2006). Self-Disclosure, Depression, Anxiety, and Suicidal Behavior in Adolescent Psychiatric Inpatients. *Crisis: The Journal of Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention*, 27, 66-71.
32. Howard, M.S., & Medway, F.J. (2004). Adolescents' Attachment and Coping with Stress. *Psychology in the Schools*, 41, 319-402.
33. Keyley, M.K. & Seery, B.L. (2001). Affect Regulation and Attachment Strategies of Adjudicated and Non-adjudicated Adolescents and Their Parents. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 23, 343-366.
34. Kernberg, O. (1977). Boundaries and Structure in Love Relations. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 25, 81-114.
35. Leary, M.R. (2001). The Self We Know the Self We Show: Self-Esteem, Self-Presentation, and the Maintenance of Interpersonal Relationships. In G.J.O. Fletcher & M.S. Clark (Eds.), *Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology: Interpersonal Processes* (pp. 457-477). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
36. Lee, J. (1973). *The Colors of Love: An Exploration of the Ways of Loving*. Don Mills, Ontario: New Press.
37. Liberman, M., Doyle, A.B., & Markiwicz, D. (1999). Developmental Patterns in Security of Attachment to Mother and Fater in Late childhood and Early Adolescence. *Child Development*, 70, 202-213.
38. McNelles, L.R., & Connolly, J.A. (1999). Intimacy between Adolescent Friends: Age and Gender Differences in Intimate Affect and Intimate Behaviors. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 9, 143-159.

39. Main, M. (1983) Exploration, Play, and Cognitive Functioning Related to Infant-Mother Attachment. *Infant Behaviour and Development*, 6, 167-174.
40. Mahler, M. (1974). Symbiosis and Individuation: The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant. *The Psychological Study of the Child*, 29, 98-106.
41. May, R. (1969). *Love and Will*. New York: Norton.
42. Meston, C.M., & Frohlich, P.F. (2003). Love at First Fright: Partner Salience Moderates Roller-Coaster Induced Excitation Transfer. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 32, 6, 537-544.
43. Moore, D. (1987). Parent-adolescent Separation: The Construction of Adulthood by Late Adolescents. *Developmental Psychology*, 23, 298-307.
44. Murray, S. & Holmes, J. & Griffin, D. (1996). The Benefits of Positive Illusions: Idealization and the Construction of Satisfaction in Close Relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 70, 79-98.
45. Määttä, K. (2005a). *Kestävä parisuhde [The Secretsof Long Marital Relationships]*. Juva: WSOY.
46. Määttä, K. (2005b). *Seniorirakkaus [The Love in Later Life]*. Juva: WSOY.
47. Määttä, K. (2006). *Rakastumisen lumous [The Fascination of Falling in Love]*. Juva: WSOY.
48. Nickerson, A.B., & Nagle, R.J. (2005). Parent and Peer Attachment in Late Childhood and Early Adolescence. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 25, 223-249.
49. Norwood, R. (1985). *Women who love too much*. Los Angeles: Tarcher/St. Martin´s.
50. Peele, S. (1988). Fools for Love: The Romantic Ideal, Psychological Theory, and Addictive Love. In R. Sternberg, & M. Barnes (Eds). *The Psychology of Love* (pp. 159-190). New Haven: Yale University Press.
51. Person, E.S. (2007). *Dreams of Love and Fateful Encounters. The Power of Romantic Passion*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
52. Pines, A.M. (1999). *Falling in Love: Why we choose the lovers we choose*. New York: Routledge.
53. Rawlins, W.K., & Holl, M.R. (1988). Adolescents´ Interactions with Parents and Friends. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 5, 27-46.
54. Riela, S., Rodriguez, G., Aron A., Xu X., & Acavedo, B.P. (2010). Experiences of Falling in Love: Investigating Culture, Ethnicity, Gender, and Speed. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 27, 4, 473-493.
55. Schaeffer, B. (1987) *Is It Love or Is It Addiction: Falling into Healthy Love*. New York: Harper and Row.
56. Sperling, M.B. (1987). Ego Identity and Desperate Love. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 51, 4, 600-605.
57. Sternberg, R.J. (1998) *Love is a Story. A New Theory of Relationships*. Oxford University Press. New York. Oxford.
58. Tennov, D. (1979). *Love and Limerence: The Experience of Being in Love*. New York: Stein & Day.
59. Twenge, J.M., & King, L.A. (2005). A Good Life Is a Personal Life: Relationship Fulfillment and Work Fulfillment in Judgements of Life Quality. *Journal of Research and Personality*, 39, 336-353.
60. Uusitalo, T. (2006). *Miten päästä yli mahdottoman? Narratiivinen tutkimus itsemurhamenetyksistä [How to get over the Impossible? A Narrative Study of Suicide Loss]*. Acta Universitatis Lapponiensis 105. Rovaniemi: Lapland University Press.

Article received: 2010-12-21

Copyright of Education Sciences & Psychology is the property of Internet Academy, Registered Union and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.