The Logical Case for Love as an Ingredient in Policy Formulation After COVID-19

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Abstract

In the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has already had disastrous public health and economic effects, but also resulted in the positive emotion of love as a spontaneous response at many levels, this article asks whether there is a need for the explicit inclusion of the emotion of love in policy formulation. It answers this affirmatively by first proposing, in Part I, what love should mean in policy formulation. However, as rationality remains highly prized in policy formulation, it considers emotion as prejudicial to its cool and level-headed processes and assumes that human behaviour is exclusively negative. To overcome this drawback, love is proposed for inclusion in policy formulation on the rationale that it is a real and positive emotion. Part II takes an eclectic approach and provides six examples of love's relevance drawn from hate studies, medicine, business, psychology, religion, and women's preferences. Together, they constitute a significant pattern and demonstrate love's versatility, making it relevant for those who formulate policy. Suggestions for policy applications are also made. While acknowledging that including love in policy formulation is not a panacea, this positive, universal, and resilient emotion should be incorporated in policy formulation to increase its effectiveness and relevance given the exceptional negativity of our times following COVID-19.

Introduction

COVID-19 has inflicted death, misery, and turmoil upon an already divided world, with a speed and on a scale few foresaw. Dire warnings have been issued: the International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecast a 'Great Lockdown' recession (International Monetary Fund, 2020); the World Food Programme (WFP) warned of 'multiple famines of biblical proportions within a short few months' (Tewelde, 2020); the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General viewed it as 'one of the most dangerous challenges this world has faced in our lifetime' (Guterres, 2020a); Bill Gates thought 'millions could die' (Gates, 2020); and the Vatican published an inter-religious appeal drawing attention to the pandemic's threat to 'the lives of millions of people', and stated that 'we should not forget to seek refuge in God, the All-Creator, as we face such severe crisis' (Vatican 2020).

Unavoidably, as governments and societies pursued their all-consuming task of responding to the pandemic with practical, medical, and economic steps, it also indirectly caused a contentious and fundamental worldwide re-examination in many disciplines. Controversies related to governance, public health, economics, and international relations are on display daily in global news media.

A multi-faceted crisis on this scale can reorder society in dramatic ways, for better or worse. COVID-19 will almost certainly affect actors in widely disparate fields, ranging from governments to educators and psychologists. Ideally, during and after this crisis, these actors may turn to the task of learning from the pandemic, as similar challenges could arise in the future.

To this end, as the selection of a question is a critical part of productive problem-solving when confronted with a complex and inter-related issue such as this pandemic, I propose the following: Has COVID-19 demonstrated a need for the explicit inclusion of love in policy formulation, using the word not in its romantic sense, but rather, as encompassing compassion, care, altruism, empathy, comfort, encouragement, affection, and understanding?

Context and validity to this question stem from the work of a giant of modern disaster studies, C. E. Fritz who noticed a positive and often overlooked aspect in such events. Drawing upon his extensive disaster response experience, he believed that 'as social animals, people perhaps come closer to fulfilling their basic human needs in the aftermath of disaster than at any other time because they developed a form of life highly compatible with these needs' (Fritz, 1996, p. 77). Disasters, in his view, create a supportive social setting, during which the merging of individual and societal needs provides a feeling of belonging and a sense of unity rarely achieved under normal circumstances. He writes:

> The entire society talks much more openly and freely about intimate feelings of fear, guilt, shame, despair, hope, love and other important sentimental concerns of human life . . . Sufferers receive a massive dose of love and reassurance from the other survivors. (Fritz, 1996, p. 67)

He could well be writing this today, with much direct and indirect evidence of the prosocial emotion of love and its cognates in responding to COVID-19.

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First, newspapers and TV stations regularly ran stories of selflessness and kindness by strangers to strangers. Health care workers, for example, received adulation for their selflessness and devotion to duty, as some had paid with their lives. People collectively and spontaneously clapped their appreciation, and military planes honoured them with a fly-over. The work of cashiers, truckers, police personnel too was seen a mixture of courage, dedication selflessness and ultimately, love. In a rare public address, Queen Elizabeth II (2020) of the UK spoke about 'our instinctive compassion to heal'. Andrew Cuomo, the governor of New York state, asked people to 'trust in love' and appealed, 'we need love now as a people' (Cuomo, 2020).

This social response appeared to have validated the views of Fritz, who observed:

> the persons who achieve high prestige in disaster-struck societies are usually those who contribute the most in relieving the stress of disaster or who, despite personal suffering, continue to make positive contributions to the social goals of relief and recovery. (Fritz, 1996, p. 67).

Second, COVID-19 increased the value attached to love, as it exacerbated the existing epidemic of loneliness (Stallard and Stallard, 2020). At one stage, with more than one billion people under lockdown, the pandemic generated a unique, globally shared psychological and physical experience. A randomly selected New York City resident could call another randomly selected resident of Kigali and exchange, in all likelihood, their common experience of separation from loved ones, their confined lives and dilemmas.

Third, at a deeper level, in the views of Amnesty International: 'for millions in wealthy nations, the pandemic might represent the first time they have experienced even an infinitesimally faint echo of what is endured by others who are caught up in calamities of a completely different nature and severity' (Shea, 2020). It thus saw the pandemic as an opportunity for solidarity and compassion to protect and assist the most vulnerable in global war zones and a choice of fear or love.

Are there enduring policy lessons in these manifestations of love during COVID-19 for policy formulation, or conversely, would such an attempt be methodologically flawed and futile?

Admittedly, disasters are, by definition, exceptional events with marked cathartic effects that heighten fear and the basic human need of security and love. Events, such as deaths and serious injury that usually take decades can occur unexpectedly in a matter of days or weeks. Because of their dissimilarity from the more prosaic and predictable rhythm of 'normal' times, it is arguable that little can be learned from them.

As this argument has some merit, I concede to it, temporarily sequester the question, and turn to how love is manifested in society when it is *not* in the midst of a disaster. Once this examination is complete, we can revisit the issue of love as it appeared during COVID-19 to evaluate if it holds longer-term lessons.

I propose to examine this issue in the following steps. First, I briefly expand on the use of the word love, then highlight the role of rationality and emotion in policy formulation and its assumptions about human nature, and, finally, provide specific examples about the presence and effectiveness of love in other fields. I argue that these eclectic examples demonstrate a pattern of love's relevance and effectiveness worthy of emulation in policy formulation.

Part I

What love should mean in policy formulation?

It has been appropriately pointed out 'there are few words more challenging to define than love' (Coombe, 2016). It has also been considered 'our supreme emotion', which 'affects everything we feel, think, do, and become' (Fredrickson, 2013, p. iii, p. 189). Fredrickson considers that thinking of love purely as romance is 'a worldwide collapse of imagination' arguing for 'upgrading' it and recognizing its 'full scope.'

Agreeing with her, for our purposes, love is used in its expanded sense as proposed in the introduction, while also excluding the problematic emotions and actions that can also be associated with love. Whatever the difficulties may be of precisely defining love academically, at the human level, policy formulation can safely assume that everybody loves to be loved. It is further submitted that love can be given to other human beings, flora and fauna, and even inanimate objects.

If we concede that love is important to humans, why then does it remain peripheral to policy formulation? The reason lies, in part, to the status accorded to rationality.

Despite persistent questioning, rationality remains highly prized in policy formulation

Rationality may be wounded and persistently questioned (Simon, 1991), however, it remains very much alive as an *ideal* in policy making. In the West and in many other countries, governments, corporations, schools, clubs, and professional associations all aspire to produce rational policies to deal with problems or concerns they consider essential to address, alleviate, control, or eliminate.

Rational policy formulation has many characteristics. An incomplete and selective list would include its focus on goals and objectives in a given decision context, a preoccupation with rigorous problem-solving (Linder and Peters, 1991), and its drive to assemble both quantitative and qualitative data from multiple sources. This is analysed in various ways, including cost benefit analysis as economics can be important in policy making (Christensen, 2017). It considers the consequences of alternatives, striving to choose the option best suited to achieve one's goals or objectives (Kørnøv and Thissen, 2000). Rational policy formulation strives to be logical, (Independent Evaluation Group, 2008) transparent (Belgrade Open School, 2019) and consultative:

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values relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness; and is open to evidence-based scrutiny such as auditing.

Rational policy formulation strives for a cool and level-headed approach, avoiding the messiness of human emotions

The many criticisms and reservations generated by the ideal of rational policy formulation lie beyond this paper (Baumgartner et al., 2014), but two of its drawbacks are relevant for our argument.

First, human rationality has been demonstrated to be 'astonishingly frail' when 'exposed to the glare of the psychological laboratory' (Vlaev, 2018, p. 1), and scientific studies have increasingly shown that emotion is integrally involved in moral judgement.

"Consensus now exists that emotions are not transient or sharp departures from moods that interfere with a supposedly steady state of rationality, but are 'potent, pervasive, predictable,.. drivers of decision making." (Lerner 2015, p. 799) . Empirically, emotion affects judgement as 'an unseen lens that colours all our thoughts, actions, perceptions and judgements' (Goodwin et al., 2001).

Although the Nobel laureate Herbert Simon wrote: 'In order to have anything like a complete theory of human rationality, we have to understand what role emotion plays in it' (Simon, 1983, p. 29), emotion remains distrusted as a potentially tainting element in policy formulation. For example, in law, (not unrelated to policy, as both help shape political and social aspects of society) 'the term [emotion] has long functioned as a catch all category for much of what law aspires to avoid or counteract: which is 'subjective, irrational, prejudicial, intangible, partial and impervious to reason' (Bandes and Blumenthal, 2012, p. 162).

Rational policy formulation focuses largely on controlling and compensating for negative human behaviour, almost completely ignoring its positive attributes and capacity

The second drawback lies in its attitude towards human nature. An age-old, yet unavoidable question for policy makers is whether to assume that humans are essentially kind, sensible, and good-natured creatures, or that they are wired to be bad, blinkered, idle, vain, vengeful, and selfish. Enacting a law, policy, or regulation requires assumptions about human nature – albeit unconsciously. Inconveniently, however, science has not settled the issue for policy makers.

On the positive side, studies on pre-verbal 6- and 10-month-old infants indicate they prefer an individual who helps another to one who hinders another, prefer a helping individual to a neutral individual, and prefer a neutral individual to a hindering individual (Hamlin et al., 2007). Research on adults has also shown that our 'first instincts tend to lead to cooperation rather than selfishness' and that 'we are an overwhelmingly cooperative species, willing to give for the good of the group even when it comes at our own personal expense' (Ward, 2012).

On the other hand, science has unearthed considerable evidence for the problematic aspects of human nature. It has been pointed out that evolutionary history has shaped the human mind in ways that tend to perpetuate intergroup conflict (McDonald et al., 2012). Humans have been shown to be moral hypocrites, as they possess a negative response to violations of fairness norms whether enacted by themselves or others (Valdesolo and DeSteno, 2008). Likewise, they can be blinkered and dogmatic, and are likely to examine relevant empirical evidence in a biased manner (Lord et al., 1979). Children can experience pleasure at another person's distress as early as four (Schulz et al., 2013), and dehumanize outgroup members from relatively early in development (McLoughlin et al., 2017). Lying is common at age two, and becomes the norm by three (Evans and Lee, 2013).

However, when faced with *both* the positive and negative aspects of human behaviour as demonstrated by science, my analysis of a purposive sample of laws, policies, and regulations indicates that they focus overwhelmingly on the negative aspects of human behaviour (See Appendix).

The obvious flaw in this model is that all positive human emotions or actions are entirely ignored in policy making. This leads policy formulation to rely heavily on regulation, restriction, limitation, and prohibition, which are characteristics of the so-called command and control approach that has been recognized as 'a major barrier to governments in delivering key policy initiatives [to] a detached and inactive public' (Seepersad, 2012).

Is there a better way? I believe there is. The positive aspects of human emotion cannot be regarded as 'secondary, derivative, illusory, epiphenomenon, parasitic upon the negative or otherwise suspect' (Peterson and Seligman, 2004, p. 4). On the rationale that love is a real and positive emotion, I propose it for inclusion as an ingredient in policy formulation.

But what are the logical reasons for doing so not liable to be dismissed as risible sentimentalism? Here are six of them.

Part II

Reason 1: as hate is being studied regarding how to control it, love must be studied to promote it

The first reason lies in the emotion opposite to love: hate. Hate however is an enormously destructive one that sows fear and division on a global scale. Consequently, rational policy has become deeply interested in hate, as it has international, national, and local dimensions.

Emblematic of this growing trend an international network was established in the UK in 2012, which 'aims to facilitate the exchange of knowledge about the study of hate and hate crime'. *International Network for Hate Studies* (*INHS;* 2013) is a journal on the subject and focuses on 'what hate is, where it comes from and how to combat it' to provide a 'deeper understanding of the processes that encourage the expression of hate so that methods of challenging and

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stopping its expression can be based on theory and research'. The objective is that '[hate] may be contained and controlled, allowing persons to reach their full human potential without fear or retribution' (Journal of Hate Studies, 2002). The UN is deeply involved in countering hate speech (UN, 2019a, 2019b).

Love has intermittently, but explicitly been used to combat terror attacks. In the wake of the Christchurch terror attack, the Prime Minister of New Zealand sought 'sympathy and love for all Muslim communities' (Lester, 2019). Following the September 11 terror attacks, the New York City's long-standing 'I Love New York' slogan was modified to 'I Still Love New York' (Klara, 2017); in 2016, after the Orlando nightclub terror attack, the US Attorney General stated, 'this attack has brought us together – in support, in solidarity and love' (Rhodan, 2016); in June 2017, the One Love Manchester benefit concert was organized after the terror attack in the city; and in September 2019, in Kabul, Afghanistan, on a peace mural of Gandhi destroyed in a terror attack in 2017, local artists painted a new one, quoting him in Persian and English: 'the day the power of love overrules the love of power, the world will know peace' (Goyal, 2019).

While the effectiveness of such responses to hate has not been established, their symbolism cannot be overlooked. The significance in the choice of the word 'love',, in fighting terrorism, manifestly encapsulating fearlessness, kindness, resilience, forgiveness, community spirit, and public healing, should not be lost on rational policy formulation.

If legislators, policy makers, and thought leaders earnestly purse the task of mastering and extinguishing hate in the public sphere, it is logically asymmetrical for them to neglect to rally the power of love for the same ends.

Reason 2: medicine is increasingly demonstrating that love may contribute to better healing outcomes

Along with an evolution in the healing paradigms of medicine, science has increasingly shed light on the healing power of love by unlocking its biochemical secrets.

The European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO) referred to oxytocin, a molecule repeatedly identified with the biochemistry of love (i.e., the 'cuddle hormone'; Pappas, 2015) which was demonstrated to have 'direct anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties in vitro models of atherosclerosis' with the heart relying upon it as 'part of a normal process of protection and self-healing' (Carter and Porges, 2013, p. 16).

The EMBO pointed that 'the molecules associated with love have restorative properties, including the ability to literally heal a 'broken heart'. In its view, 'although research into the mechanisms through which love protects us against stress and disease is in its infancy', we have 'much to learn about love and much to learn from love.' Ultimately, it concluded, 'without loving relationships, humans fail to flourish, even if all their other basic needs are met' (Carter and Porges, 2013, p. 12).

Evidence of the positive effects of skin-to-skin contact as an important vehicle for expressing love has been building up. A study found that when a person holds the hand of an ailing partner, their hearts and respiratory rates synchronize, and the pain felt lessens (Goldstein et al., 2017). Loving touch has been found to be crucial for premature infants. 'Kangaroo Care' which, in essence, uses the mother's body heat to keep their babies warm, has demonstrated the profound long-term consequences of maternal contact (Feldman et al., 2014). A medical study found that in 119 men and 40 women undergoing coronary angiography 'the more people felt loved and supported, the less coronary atherosclerosis they had at angiography, independent of other risk factors' (Ornish, 1990).

Aware of love's potential, private foundations are increasingly integrating love in new healing paradigms. The Fetzer Institute has sponsored research on love and healing. Similarly, Shriner's Hospital for Children has 'Love to the Rescue' as its motto. A doctor from a renowned clinic considers that we thrive on love and compassion, which are as essential to our inner being as food and breath are to our physical body (Sood, 2013).

The healing potential of love in medicine appears to be related to the presence of, relationship with, and touch by other humans. This insight is related to an issue that has grown imperceptibly, yet steadily over the years in some large cities: loneliness. Some, such as The Cost of Loneliness Project (2018), consider it as 'one of the most urgent social and public health crises of our time'. Anxiety over involuntary loneliness has become a big public issue, particularly in northern European and Anglo-Saxon countries. In 2017 Vivek Murthy, the former Surgeon General of the US declared 'an epidemic of loneliness'. The extent of reported loneliness is essentially a drought of love on a societal scale, which imposes heavy economic costs (Flowers et al., 2017) and causes individual suffering (Cherry, 2020).

Applying this to the field of urban planning, in recent years, the role of cities in contributing to social isolation has come under scrutiny. They have been critiqued as 'designed for loneliness' (Rao, 2018). Researchers have even ventured to test the hypothesis that 'the effects of isolation in urban environments parallel the effects of isolation in prison confinement settings' and tried to provide a 'deeper understanding of the connections between the issues of social isolation, mental health and urban design' (Price, 2016).

With around 55 per cent of the world's population thought to be living in urban areas or cities, policy formulation must maintain an interest in urban design. If our cities exacerbate the perception of solitary existence, thus increasing our chances of illness, then there must be a deliberate effort in the opposite direction. This means ensuring that human sociality is a core consideration when writing urban development regulations.

In the realm of urban planning, it implies that policy makers look beyond the use of easily measurable metrics (e.g., CO2 emissions and energy consumption), and ask more abstract, but essential questions, such as: does urban policy

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formulation encourage designing buildings and streets that are configured in a socially sensitive way? Do they promote all varieties of interactions, ranging from momentary eye contact to long-term intimacy with partners? Ultimately, do our urban planning policies encourage love?

To expect such an orientation from urban planners is not utopian, illogical, or overly ambitious, as 'humans are social, yet this primary fact of life is oddly absent as a core consideration in modern urban development regulations' (Price, 2016).

Learning from the latest scientific advances in medicine, mayors could regard the promotion of love as an integral part of their governance and policy formulation responsibilities.

Reason 3: businesses use love's appeal for profit

Businesses know the economic value of the word 'love', After excluding products associated with romantic love (Cullen, 2019), many enterprises include appeal to love for selling diverse products.

For example, Subaru, a Japanese car manufacturer, tries to entice customers by informing them: 'Love. It's what makes a Subaru, a Subaru'. Honda and Nissan have also leveraged love to sell (Nissan Motors Co., 2009; The Webby Awards, 2010). McDonald's, the global fast-food giant, uses the slogan 'I'm lovin' it.' As the company's 'most successful and longest-running campaign', this approach was defined by one of its officials as 'authentic, [and] more saturated in consumer insights and emotion' (York, 2010). A US organic food chain invites people to 'shop in the name of love'. An eyeglasses vendor, LensCrafters, ran an ad stating, 'see what you love, love what you see', and used the visual device of two hands creating a heart to frame the different things people love. The company's creative team explained that it had 'zeroed in on a sentiment that they felt had powerful potential and had never been expressed in the advertising' (Parpis, 2009). Marmite (2020), a British yeast spread, has a customer 'loveline'.

Just as businesses unlock the economic power of love and influence buying behaviour, policy makers can do the same by invoking love as an objective and ideal. Such use has precedent at the city level.

In 1976, New York was a city teetering on the brink, blighted by crime and middle-class flight to the suburbs. In response, city authorities launched the 'I Love New York' slogan to reverse falling tourism revenues. The slogan, along with its heart shaped logo, has endured since then, appearing on everything from keychains, to coffee mugs, to subway ads. It remains a healthy source of revenue for the city, with its success attributed to the fact that it 'conveys emotions' and 'still represents the spirit of the city' (Klara, 2017). Building on its experience, in 2018, New York City Service launched its 'Love Your Block' initiative for block clean up and improvement. (New York City Service, 2020).

Examples also exist at the national level. Love was included in Scotland's performance framework with one of its national values expressed as 'we grow up loved, safe and respected so that we realize our full potential' (Scottish Government Constitution and Cabinet Directorate, 2018).

The UN is taking the lead by ushering in love on the international stage. In July 2019, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution calling on countries, the private sector, civil society, and individuals to build and promote the 'culture of peace with love and conscience' (UN, 2019a).

We can extend this argument and make a case for updating democratic ideals that have remained frozen in countries' constitutions. If liberty, equality, and fraternity could be ideals for the French revolutionaries – and remain part of French national heritage – love can also be inducted into a country's constitution as it has much in common with fraternity. If the 'pursuit of happiness', promoting 'general welfare', and securing 'the blessings of liberty' inspired the framers of the US constitution, then promoting love for the same purposes can be logically defended.

Just as shrewd marketeers use love to channel people's behaviour as consumers, policy makers can do the same and influence people's behaviour to generate more meaningful citizen involvement in governance. Instead of remaining static, democratic values and ideals should be updated to include love to respond more effectively and holistically to the complex policy context of our times.

Reason 4: positive psychology marshals the power of love

Positive psychology is defined by the Positive Psychology Center as 'the scientific study of the strengths that enable individuals and communities to thrive'. It believes people want 'to lead meaningful lives, to cultivate what is best within themselves, to enhance their experiences of love, work and play'. However, as noted by a positive psychology pioneer, Harvard psychiatrist George E. Vaillant, the Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry had, roughly 1,000,000 lines of text, with thousands of lines devoted to anxiety and depression and hundreds discussing terror, shame, guilt, anger, and fear. But only five lines in the textbook discussed hope, only one mentions joy, and not a single line mentions compassion or love (Lambert, 2007).

In effect, he was pointing out that the traditional practitioners of psychology were being trained to smell only odours and ignore any perfumes.

Peterson and Seligman's book *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* included Love and the Capacity to Love as one of the 24 character strengths. In their view:

> Humans have theorized about love and relationships for as long as they have theorized about anything. Surprisingly, it has only been in the last 30 years or so that the methods of empirical science have been applied to the task of understanding and explaining love . . . The capacity to love and be loved is now viewed as an innate species typical tendency that has powerful effects on psychological and physical health from infancy through old age. (Peterson and Seligman, 2004, p. 305)

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Positive psychology's central insight that it is imbalanced to examine only the negative aspects of the human mind and ignore its positive aspects, can be applied to the aforementioned issue of increasing societal loneliness.

Specifically, positive psychology's relevance lies in its well-established enquiry into subjective wellbeing (SWB) and an extensive collection of validated instruments for measuring wellbeing, which directly or indirectly relate to love. For example, one of the five essential elements of Gallup's Well-Being Index is social, or 'having supportive relationships and love in your life' (Witters, 2019). Likewise, a mental wellbeing scale developed by Warwick Medical School (2020) represents wellbeing as holistically linked to other aspects including social wellbeing.

These surveys offer a possible avenue for progress. Currently, however, they are largely focused on assessing only the perceptions of loneliness (Office for National Statistics, 2018). They could, for example, be modified to ascertain whether people feel loved. This would be consistent with the spirit of measuring positive emotion, something already done in the case of happiness. Pertinently, research has established that 'employees who felt they work in a loving, caring culture, reported higher levels of satisfaction and teamwork. Employees who feel love perform better' (Barsade and O'Neill, 2014).

Policy makers' willingness to promote love would have specific advantages. It would demonstrate that policy formulation is open to dialogue with and learning from any area of scientific enquiry – positive psychologists are equally worthy of consultation as economists. Moreover, it would offer a new interpretative lens in addressing complex social problems and contribute to the growing social agenda of promoting wellbeing and a flourishing society (New Economics Foundation, 2004). Finally, policy makers will also be able to transition from a deficit focus to an asset focus.

The science of wellbeing is theoretically, metrically, and empirically ripe and ready to be used by policy makers in practical ways to measure and increase love in society.

Reason 5: with varying degrees of emphasis, major religions all refer to love

Despite the consensus in Western secular societies that religion is best excluded from rational policy formulation and the still existing mutually exclusive domains of faith and science, the plain fact is that religious expression has existed without interruption since its emergence very early in human history (Smith, 2007); 84 per cent of humanity state themselves as belonging to a religion (Hackett and Grimm, 2012); it clearly has social functions, as Émile Durkheim observed and all attempts to eradicate religion have failed.

While it is true that religious love as preached and practiced can be problematic, as it may be reserved for the believing group, a common message of love resonates in all major religions.

Christian theologians state that Christianity is the assertion that love is the most powerful force in the universe. In Works of Love, Søren Kierkegaard, a philosopher, claimed that Christianity is unique because love is a requirement (Kierkegaard, 1995). The Christian injunction to 'love thy neighbour as yourself' is widely, if not universally, known.

In Islam, the Prophet Mohammed is reported to have said: 'you will not enter paradise until you believe, and you will not believe until you love one another' (Huraira, 2020).

In the Jewish tradition, in Hebrew, *Ahava* is the most commonly used term for both interpersonal love of family, love of God and the affection or care one person shows for another (The Bible Project, 2017). *Chesed* has been explained as 'mercy', 'lovingkindness', 'steadfast love', and 'compassion' (Hebrew for Christians, 2020).

In Hinduism, the Bhagavat Gita put forward *bhakti yoga*, the path of devotion and love. The Bhakti movement in medieval India placed great emphasis on intensely loving the Divine personally without priestly interventions. Its message that 'everybody could love God' had important prosocial effects including non-violence towards all living beings, social equality, and vegetarian kitchens, as well as mutual social service concepts (Schomer and McLeod, 1987).

In Buddhism, the Metta prayer, known as the Lovingkindness prayer, is an unconditional, inclusive and wise love that exists without expectations of anything in return. It begins by using the self as the subject, then extended to other specific people, and finally, out to the whole world (Yogapedia, 2020).

Sikhs believe they are to 'easily forgive, never hate anyone and to love by His will' (Singh, 2009)

Sufi and Ahmadiyya teachings also present messages of love, which are clearly prosocial. The Baha'i teachings state that Bahais should love all human regardless of religion, race, or community, and should love their enemies (Smith, 2000).

While there are valid historical and scientific reasons why policy formulation does not consider religious doctrine as a legitimate input into its decision-making process, I argue that this exclusion should not extend to the *effects* of religious faith, as they are of direct relevance to policy makers and proven by empirical data. This is especially so in the field of public health.

A comprehensive meta-analysis by the Mayo Foundation for Medical Education reported that religious involvement and spirituality were associated with better health outcomes, even after adjustment for potential confounding variables. It stated, 'religious and spiritual practices such as meditation, prayer, and worship, engender positive emotions such as hope, love, contentment, and forgiveness and limit negative emotions such as hostility' (Mueller et al., 2001).

The range of positive effects was striking. Religiously involved persons lived longer, had lower rates of cardiovascular disease and blood pressure, less risk of depression and higher rates of recovery, lower likelihood of abusing alcohol, and experienced fewer hospitalizations and shorter hospital stays. It was associated with high levels of health-related quality of life (HRQOL) in persons with cancer, HIV, amputations and spinal cord injuries. Religious involvement was also associated with health-promoting behaviours such as more exercise, proper nutrition, more seat belt use, and

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smoking cessation. These outcomes are the standard concern of public health policy.

In addition to its utility in public health, religiously inspired messages of love have also been used effectively by respected leaders. In leading India to independence from Britain, Gandhi elevated love to a 'law' that required extending love to all of humanity. Martin Luther King Jr., inspired by Gandhi, connected his words to the Biblical appeal of Jesus, to 'love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you' (Little, 2019).

More recently, former US President Barack Obama also argued that religious messages have utility for a public servant, provided some conditions are satisfied. In 2006, he wrote 'my faith shapes my values, but applying those values to policy making must be done with the principles that are accessible to all people, religious or not' (Obama, 2006).

The common messages of love in all major religions offers policy makers and practitioners an opportunity to communicate with various faith communities at a time of growing religious diversity in many countries using their deeply felt and internalized lexicon.

Reason 6: women's actions show that compassion and love-based approaches and solutions strongly resonate with them

A triangulation of data from seemingly disparate fields shows a persistent pattern of women expressing their strengths and preferences for policy approaches based on love, compassion, and care through their actions.

In evidentiary terms, science has established that 'compassion mechanisms evolved differentially in women' who reported greater emotional sensitivity than men 'when viewing aversive and suffering situations' (Jacobs, 2017). Aligned with this finding, data from Nielsen's 2014 corporate social responsibility worldwide survey found 'women appear more invested in human oriented causes' (Neilson Company, 2015). Another study noted that 'gender matters in philanthropy'. Women scored 'significantly higher than men on measures of empathic concern and principle of care' on 'prosocial traits and sense of moral obligation' (Mesch et al., 2011). A Yale University led meta-analysis found 'women are intuitively more altruistic than men' (Hathaway, 2016).

Women constitute the majority of animal rights activists (Gaarder, 2011) and animals have long benefited from women's love, through organizations such as the Women's Animal Center. Women are increasingly choosing careers in veterinary medicine partly out the caring image of veterinarians portrayed in books and on television (Slater, 2000). One reason why more women are vegetarian appears to be their greater concern for animal rights.

Women's preferences are also reflected in their fierce commitment to and agency on children's issues, independent of their status. JK Rowling founded the Lumos Foundation to address the worldwide problem of orphans. In the US, Mothers against Drunk Driving (MADD) was founded by a woman whose daughter was killed by a drunk driver; in the Netherlands, the Mothers of Srebrenica represented 6,000 women who had lost family members during the Srebrenica genocide in 1995; and Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand, appointed herself the minister for child poverty reduction (Luscombe, 2020).

In my decade-long work in various UN peacekeeping missions, I have noticed a distinct pattern of women placing greater emphasis on solutions and approaches to conflict that can be traced back to care and love.

Women are already trailblazers regarding how love can be integrated in policy formulation. In the US, Marianne Williamson, an early contender in the 2020 presidential election, generated interest with her message of 'transformation and love' (Wu, 2019). Julia Unwin, a Carnegie Fellow, has called kindness, emotions, and human relationships as the blind spot in public policy (Unwin, 2018).

Women's strengths in compassion and ending suffering are well known to the UN, which has a deliberate strategy of encouraging women's participation in peace processes, as this 'increases the durability and quality of peace' (Krause and Bränfors, 2018). The UN Secretary-General has noted there 'is plenty of evidence that women are more open than men to reducing their personal environmental impact' (Guterres, 2020b).

The Secretary-General is on solid empirical ground. As far back as the 1970s, a women's environmental campaign in India, the Chipko movement, worked to protect trees with novel tactics: it embraced trees to impede loggers. Chipko in Hindi means 'to hug' or 'to cling to.' The symbolism of women activists choosing this tactic when the embrace is universally seen as an expression of love, care, closeness, and trust hardly needs emphasis. Today, Working Women for Oceans—a women's non-profit—explicitly works to help save oceans and asks citizens to 'protect what you love'(Burgess 2020).

When stitched together, these disparate data points suggest that women, as creators of life and more than 50 per cent of the world's population, are strongly in favour of a caring and loving approach to address important societal issues. Indeed, it would be plausible to advance and test the hypothesis that including love as an ingredient in policy formulation could act as a magnet for encouraging women to participate more fully in the public sphere catalysing a virtuous cycle of their greater participation and enhanced empowerment.

With a strong commitment to gender equality at the heart of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, policy formulation ignores their preferences at the cost of its relevance.

Caveats and conclusion

We can now return to our sequestered question: did COVID-19 demonstrate anything about need for the explicit inclusion of love in policy formulation?

Pattern recognition is a critical tool to solve complex problems. The essential pattern outlined above in five of the six aforementioned examples is the presence of love and its positive impact. In addition, it was clearly in evidence and

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deeply craved in global disaster that COVID-19 is. The only possible logical conclusion is its enduring importance to human affairs broadly. It is difficult to see why policy formulation should be exempt from its application.

Caveats are required, of course. First, love in policy formulation is not a panacea. Few, if any, exist. Policy formulation will have to continue addressing the problematic aspects of human nature. The 'crooked timber' of humanity will not straighten. Both background checks and handcuffs will still be needed.

Second, this is not a call to exclude rationality in policy formulation, which will remain essential to how we address public issues. Its data-based, empirical approach is too powerful to ever become irrelevant.

Third, it is not argued that furnishing love is a government function. Rational policy formulation can attempt to create caring institutional structures that foster love; however, the source of love remains the same as it has always been – people.

If we keep our ambitions modest, in purely technical policy formulation terms, love can be used both as an objective and an evaluative tool of great utility. In that sense, the inclusion of love would be nothing more than an interdisciplinary effort to bring behavioural realism to the public realm, contributing to the uncontroversial and never-ending quest of designing more relevant and effective policy.

But if we raise our sights higher, there is no reason why love's utility should remain confined to specialist policy makers. Love must be broadly recognized as a positive and *actionable* emotion that benefits both society and individuals.

Count its strengths. It is inherently democratic – all can love and be loved because we are human. With strong 'branding', it is instinctively recognizable. Precise definitions of what it is may differ, but not the recognition of its centrality to humans. It is as meaningful to an infant as to a person on a deathbed; to a penniless person or a billionaire; to someone who lives in a delta or a desert; to someone who speaks Wolof or Tamil. Resilient, scalable, and omnidirectional, we can offer love to those in our immediate surroundings; our extended families; neighbourhoods, provinces, and countries; flora and fauna; the whole of humanity; and our planet.

With all its benefits, incorporating love as an ingredient in policy formulation will be nothing less than an act of public wisdom, for, in the unfinished empirical attempt to precisely define 'wisdom', there is nevertheless consensus that it is a form of advanced cognitive and emotional development.

COVID-19 is a turning point in history. For the UN Secretary-General Guterres, we are in 'a world in pieces' (UN News, 2017) where 'more people distrust institutions and feel that existing systems do not work.' His advice to governments and the UN, was to listen more closely to their people (UN News, 2020).

Such listening cannot be more of the same. Truth be told, there has been too much deference to siloed and elite 'experts' who have oversold us the virtues of double-blind, randomized control studies, while inexplicably remaining silent on love's reality, power and importance to the human condition and its self-evident implications for policy formulation. Try as they might convince us that the answers lie in economics, medicine, international politics and clever algorithms alone, the fact is they do not. The pervasive and intangible threat that Covid-19 poses to our humanity must be countered with something equally pervasive and intangible that too is a part of our humanity: our universal capacity to love. This requires an end to the thrall of empiricism.

But whether this will happen, and we will use this 'supreme' emotion of love to serve—albeit in very small measure—as an antidote to a world increasingly on edge, remains to be seen.

Note

The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations.

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Appendix

Ten purposive examples of the exclusive focus in laws, rules, regulations, and policies on negative human behaviour.

1. Legislatures pass laws and require policies that prohibit discrimination in lending to counter prejudice based on race or colour, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, and other factors (Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, 2019).
2. States adopt minimum wage laws to stop employers from exploiting desperate workers (The Balance, 2019).
3. Health authorities adopt regulations that require restaurant employees to wash their hands after toilet breaks in order to prevent the spread of infections to counter the negative tendency of negligence, laziness, or ignorance (Centers for Disease Control, 2016).
4. Child support laws seek to counter any attempt by the non-custodial parent to evade responsibility to support the child financially, and can be enforced, even by jail (Our Family Wizard, 2020).
5. Local authorities require drivers to buckle up to counter the tendency to avoid wearing them for various reasons including discomfort, vanity, and mistaken beliefs that they are redundant, by imposing fines (US Legal, 2019).
6. Health authorities require graphic health warning labels on cigarette packages, aiming, in part, to arouse fear, in order to counter people's ability to rationalize unhealthy habits and the inability to understand the nature of risk (Live Science, 2008).
7. A city requires dog owners to pick up their waste to counter the owner's tendency to avoid an unpleasant task (Storm water center, 1999).
8. Universities ban plagiarism to counter the negative human behaviour of a person unduly benefiting from the work of another, which marks the person as unethical or untrustworthy (Cornell Law School, 1992)
9. Employers use a variety of tools, including electronic time tracking, to monitor their employees to counteract their negative human tendency to waste time (Desk Time, 2020).
10. Gyms can place time limit restrictions (e.g., no more than 30 minutes for cardio equipment), in part, to counter inconsiderate behaviour by some users (Arena District Athletic Club, 2016).

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