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INTRODUCTION

While love, as a phenomenon explicitly cultivated at work, may be organizationally unusual, it is an increasingly common theme in new age management rhetoric (Andersen and Born 2008). Love, Walker (2011) observes, is an emergent concept in neo-normative control theory, which posits management through individual freedoms as the defining element of the contemporary workplace. The freedoms encouraged are those of self-expression and a high degree of discretion (Cederström and Grassman 2008; Fleming 2009). Sternberg's (1986) well-known triangle theory of love suggests that love has three components: intimacy (i.e., emotional investment and closeness), passion (excitement and arousal, both emotional and physical), and commitment (a decision to maintain the relationship over time). While Sternberg is referring to romantic love, in the ordinarily understood sense of the term, the general idea of "feelings of affection, compassion, caring, and tenderness for others" (Barsade and O'Neill 2014, p. 2) falls under the definition of companionate love, something that we might find outside dyadic interpersonal and sexual relations. It is this that new age managerialism professes (Boje 2008).

Etzioni (1964) suggests that the normative can be as performative for managerial control as are calculative or coercive mechanisms. As modern organizations transitioned from a command and control paradigm, using hard power and exploitation of hard labor, towards post-bureaucratic approaches that rely on soft power (Courpasson 2006) and organizational identification, their dynamics changed. Such as [Caroline Lim, the global head of HR and corporate affairs at PSA International](#), argued (in [Kolesnikov-Jessop 2015, p.](#)), "I strongly believe in the people philosophy that 'brains can be bought, but hearts and minds have to be won'." Globalization and rampant neo-economic liberalism destroyed what Newton (2006) called "the village", the spontaneous form of human community whose synoptical tendencies make virtuous behavior a condition with which to prosper economically. The anonymity of the industrialized and urbanized world freed individuals

from the village's social and moral precepts, introducing new forms of panoptical control into factory life. In an influential formulation, *Gemeinschaft* (community) was seen to be giving way to *Gesellschaft* (society) (Tönnies 1957).

Etzioni expected that normative control and commitment would not be generalized organizational phenomena but would be embedded in particular organizational contexts, such as religious orders (at least before the widespread examples of sexual and other abuse disturbed ideological appearances). In contemporary times there is an increasing interest in trying to build normative bases for managerial control that reconcile *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* by means of a religious perspective. For example, Ray et al. (2014) developed a normative core for stakeholder management based on Christian, Islamic and Judaic faiths, which includes re-centering community at the core of human and business activity, a skeptical view on the misapplication of economic power, tempering the importance and normative role attributed to individual liberty, and giving a stronger emphasis to a reciprocal relationship between the individual and society.

In contemporary times organizations have become increasingly “soft machines”¹, compared to older disciplinary models of command and control; increasingly, managers seek “to tighten the bonds yet keep them loose” (Bauman 1995, p. vii). In a world where modern social relations offer little sense of binding obligation and consuming passions do not suffice², the desires for belonging are increasingly met, suggest new age and related management writers, by a new sense of belonging to be found in organizations. Organizations do not feature heavily in Bauman's work (but see

¹ The idea of a “soft machine” was originally a reference to the human body in Burrough's (1961) novel, although when the slogan, “Bite the soft machine, it will crack up in the end” made its way on to the walls of Paris in May 1968, it had become an anarcho-syndicalist term of resistance and defiance. It seems timely to revivify the notion of soft machinery, with its Surrealist overtones, as a way of describing those organizations in which Courpasson noted (2006) soft domination as the major form of control. The idea is meant to capture the old machine model of bureaucracy giving way to soft machines that are more likely to be filled with neo-normative rather than harsh disciplinary control (Bauman 2003).

² In matters of interpersonal love, the success of apps such as Tinder and Grindr serve symbolically as a sign of the loosening of individuals from the ties that used to bind, making them both more anomic (Durkheim 1933) and more urbanely anonymous. Organizations can fill the void in fleeting lives by offering that which is lacking interpersonally: a sense of belonging, *caritas*, even love.

Kociatkiewicz and Kostera 2014). Jensen (2014), however, has noted the influence of Tönnies (1957) on Bauman's work in general. Following his lead, we will suggest that organizations offer the possibility of members identifying with them, indeed, loving them, finding forms of gratification that escape them elsewhere. Bosses seek employees to show generalized love for their organization, supplementing the old categories of the deferential, traditional and instrumental worker (Goldthorpe et al. 1968). Normatively performative expressive workers will be expected. Organizations that seek to remodel the world of legal contract into a world of moral belonging promulgate mutual companionate love between bosses and employees as the basis of an identity founded on organizational commitment (Roe et al. 2008). Increasingly, vanguard organizations such as Google offer the gift of love (Walker 2011): the question is, can similar offers be found in practice more generally?

We explore the question of the “gift of love” in what follows. [Following Barsade and O’Neill \(2014\) who note that the word “love” is rarely found in the management literature, despite the few recent sightings](#), we enquire empirically into how bosses represent normatively performative generalized love as an organizational *practice*. We inductively investigated a sample of managers likely to value love in their daily practice (i.e. practice some form of being a *loving leader*). In keeping with the overall normativity of religion, we sought such managers and leaders amongst the ranks of ACEGE, the Portuguese association of Christian managers and entrepreneurs. The sampling is very deliberate: with Flyvbjerg (2006), we would argue that exemplary or atypical cases reveal more information than the randomly sampled average. Love, in a generalized mode, is a central tenet of the Christian faith. Consequently, bosses drawn from the ranks of religious managers should, in principle, provide a purposive sample for which the expression of such love would neither be foreign nor strange. Christian love implies a normative appreciation that strives to be universal and broad in its application. As such, our choice for a sample of Christian managers is purposive in the sense that our interviewees would be sufficiently reflective on the topic to provide an informed perspective on

the relationship between love and organization. At the same time, such a sample allows us to build an archetypical image of the expression of love by managers in organizations. Such image allows future studies to more easily compare our findings with contrasting samples (e.g. agnostic or atheist managers). We outline our methods next.

METHOD

Sampling

We contacted a pool of twenty-six CEO level staff (57% male) to study the topic of bosses' attitudes to work empirically. Eighteen of those contacted agreed to participate in semi-structured in-depth interviews, which we conducted *in vivo*. All informants were Portuguese, with five working for multinational corporations. The sample included bosses of large (8 participants), small and mid-sized firms (7 participants), and NGOs (3 participants). The participants' ages ranged from 41 to 62, with an average of 49.5. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. They were recorded and transcribed verbatim, producing a total of 140 single-spaced pages of written material.

Data Collection

Data were collected via semi-structured interviews (Fossey et al. 2002) after securing permission from each participant. The conversations took place in the interviewee's private offices. The inductive in-depth interview methodology supported our objective of exploring the topic as broadly as possible, without pre-conceived hypotheses. The interview protocol consisted of 14 standard questions (available from the authors) that sought to capture how the concept of love is interpreted in daily management practices and how such interpretations translate into action. First, these bosses were asked to explain their understanding of love. Next, they were questioned on the types of actions that express love in a managerial context, and finally on the perceived consequences (including economic consequences) of such actions. Some participants were interviewed more than

once to clarify previous responses or further develop pertinent emerging themes. Data collection was interrupted once interviewees began re-iterating previously obtained information, imposing a limit on the extraction of any further novel information. Consequently, data collection continued until conceptual saturation had been achieved.

We conducted our fieldwork according to the methodological protocols of inductive research (Glaser and Strauss 1967) to identify the building blocks of love as an organizational phenomenon. We constructed an analysis of sensemaking about love by grounding our categories in bosses' worldviews in their natural organizational settings. Grounded theory aims to produce theory from the bottom up (Gioia et al. 2013), letting data form the basis for theory construction. The data was organized around semiotic clusters allowing us to gain access to implicit, rich and deep meanings underlying individual discourses (Feldman 1995) that are systematically represented in a three-column table. The first order concepts emerged directly from the data. Our theorizing was thus based on the informants' own language (Clark et al. 2010). The transformation of written concepts into categories using thematic association facilitated the emergence of second order themes not explicit in the first order data. Second order themes thus incorporated an interpretative component of the data, as well as an interrogation of the extant theory of organization at the boundaries of our research topic. Subsequently, **third-order** categories (*i.e. overarching dimensions*) were abstracted, representing an interpretative effort to lift data to a higher level of conceptual analysis (Suddaby 2006). Third-order categories thereby captured the deeper meanings of the phenomenon under theoretical scrutiny.

Data Sorting

We organized the data around six second-order themes (*emerging from 20 first-order ones*). *These themes represent three constructs (sources, processes/paths, outcomes; see below), each encompassing two levels of analysis: individual, and organizational.* The progressive depth of

abstraction resulted from the analysis of the data, as well from interrogation of several literatures that were considered relevant in making sense of the data. Literatures on love, virtue ethics, and community were drawn upon to inform our analysis as these themes were consistently mentioned during the interviews. Parallel consideration of data with theory was not meant to force the data to “fit” into existing theoretical frameworks, but rather to enrich data interpretation with valid conceptual explanations (Smets et al. 2015), as the interpretive work progressed.

Table 1 about here

Sources, the first construct refers to what, according to the respondents, makes the creation of love possible. At the individual level, informants gave special emphasis to matters of character, particularly the leader’s inner compass (George 2007). At the organizational level, leaders potentially act as *foci* of love throughout the organization, given their character strengths and their influence over organizational identity (Schein 1992). *Processes*, the second **construct**, refer to the paths through which respondents saw love being expressed and diffused within organizations. **At the individual level**, virtuous leaders were described as particularly significant conduits of love both through their example and through what they prioritize. **At the organizational level**, an organizational culture that emphasizes humanistic values through a community orientation was also described as particularly important. *Outcomes* highlight the result of the two processes described above. These outcomes orient individuals within organizations towards fostering personal virtuous moral identities (**individual level**). Further, they additionally support the cultivation of organizations as moral communities committed to promoting the wellbeing of others (**organizational level**).

The six second-order themes were organized into two overarching dimensions: (1) virtue-oriented organization, and (b) community-oriented organization (Figure 1). These **final dimensions** were not drawn directly from the primary data but emerged from the successive iterations of data analysis. To check the robustness of the findings through comparison of our interpretative scheme

with the interviewees' own thinking, we discussed the emerging interpretive model with four of our interviewees (Fossey et al. 2002). The combination of methodological approaches and procedures (semi-structured interviews, interrogation of the literature as the analysis progressed, discussion of the emerging interpretation with participants) enabled us to bring greater robustness to the interpretive effort. Next, we discuss the findings.

Figure 1 about here

FINDINGS

As a general finding, interviewees described love within organizations as related to positive collective practices characterizing “virtue-oriented communities.” More importantly, when probed on their justification for this inference, participants indicated six defining dimensions of organizations that evoke love as a managerial process. The emergence of these six themes followed an iterative process, rather than emerging in a linear manner (Clark et al. 2010). As suggested by the notion of theoretical sampling (Parry 1998), at each iteration categories were refashioned to build theory while consulting theory to conceptually ground the codes (Gioia et al. 2013; Weston et al. 2000). From increased familiarity with the data, the overarching idea of organizations functioning as virtue-oriented communities emerged as a dual, overarching dimension capturing the meaning created inter-subjectively by our informants, leading us to analyze the literature on firms as communities (is this necessary?)

In the next subsection, we identify the findings that led to our understanding the importance of virtue-oriented communityship or *Gemeinschaft*, presenting and discussing each of the themes that emerged at the less abstract levels. In doing so, we reconnect with the conceptual architecture Tönnies (1957) bequeathed to sociology through the focus of contemporary empirical investigation.

First Overarching Dimension: Virtue-oriented Organization

The Leader's Personal Compass

Three first order categories related to how organizations build virtuosity in terms of the conceptual pillars by which their bosses strive to develop love within the organization. There was general agreement that the ability to (manage with) love rests largely upon the solid foundation of the virtue of the individual leader. Interviewees further described the leader's virtue as anchored in a spiritual dimension: a personal motivation towards "good" that was informed by character strengths. The spiritual dimension was reported to come either from the duty of congruency towards individual religious beliefs or from some personal disposition, i.e. from the inner self: "[Acts of love] come from the inner self". For some participants, the foundation was salient and unquestionably spiritually supernatural: "[the duty to manage with love] is written in *Caritas in Veritate*", as observed by one participant.

"Until just a few days ago I would tell you I do not know [where it comes from] because it was so intuitive that I didn't think about it. ...I only started doing this introspection about of what [love means] to me. I just started thinking about... I realized it really, in my case, always happened in a natural way because I know no different [way]. But the more I reflected, the more I realized that for sure (and I say this to you, I swear, I do not want to be arrogant), when I strongly believe that this analysis could only come from God, cannot come from anywhere else."

Other informants expressed their conviction that love is part of everyday action, therefore necessarily a part of daily life in organizations: "...[love] comes from within, it is inside us, it lives in us." Some participants saw love as the guiding principle for character excellence, a force that gives purpose to their lives (Craig and Snook 2014), thus guiding everyday decision-making. Love becomes the belief that provides the feeling that there is a purpose in and meaning to life. It encompasses a sense of directedness and intentionality that is particularly important for decision-making. Love was seen as a source of meaning in the uncertain and ambiguous situations: love becomes the guiding principle that commits the self to act in manners that allow others to grow in a

safe way, thus confirming the dimensions of spirituality found within some of the management literature (Gupta et al. 2014), as one respondent pointed out:

“[...] I think [love] requires an inner wealth, either by faith or by any other reason. I think faith helps a lot but it can be something other than faith. [Love] allows for an inner wealth, an insight, greater self-knowledge, self-confidence, and a great strength of character ... a very strong self-awareness. So I think it is not immediate, it is not only by example, ...example leads people to think about love, to question themselves more, to be more aware”

Another informant put it in the following way: “Love is something that you live, experience and with which you organize and prioritize the matters of your life.” These observations are in line with Argandoña (2011, p. 82), who described love as a virtue, defining it as “a habit that facilitates decision making (...) serves to evaluate actions (...) and (...) moves the will to act in a particular way.” When love is present throughout childhood, our interviewees suggested that people develop a deeply held assumption that love is integral to social interactions: “Of course, you learn it with your parents they teach how to live life, which values to follow.”

The fact that some leaders are capable of translating love to the managerial context was mentioned, a notion that echoes the central role of moral identity as the base of ethical agency. Aquino and Reed (2002) suggest honesty, kindness, care, and compassion are important personality traits identified with virtuous people. The ethics and managerial literature have considered the role of emotions in leadership, namely the emotion of love (Barsade and O’Neil 2014; Frederickson 2013). The literature on servant leadership and spiritual leadership also highlights the role of love in explaining how leaders inspire followers (Dierendonck and Patterson 2014; Parry and Kempster 2014; [van Dierendonck and Patterson 2014](#)). Shotter and Tsoukas (2014) add that a leader’s lack of emotional engagement reveals important aspects about the leader’s character to the organization.

Organizational Culture of Love

A second second-order theme referred to *an organizational culture of love*. In parallel with individual characteristics as foundations for love, facilitative organizational factors were also advanced. By enacting love, leaders inspire others to do the same (via normative practices, human behavioral mimicry, and social and emotional contagious processes; Barsade and Gibson 2007; Chartrand and Lakin, 2013; Menges and Kilduff, 2015). How bosses and managers communicate with staff, including their availability to understand and listen to employees, not rushing decisions but taking time to think about the broader consequences of a decision, demonstrates the requisite culture. As explained by one of our participants, “Before deciding and acting [we ought to] take a moment to ponder the various perspectives of that decision, its consequences particularly, who’s going to be affected, positively and negatively, and how the decision is going to be perceived.” Love can thus influence organizational members both directly and via the emotional component of an organization’s culture (Barsade and O’Neill 2014). Interviewees reported their own experience of how influential others served as inspirational examples to enact cultures of love:

“Having role models to follow is crucial. A good example is a strong influence"... the values of the organization are generally the values of the leader. Then these values will influence all stakeholders, which in turn are a consequence of the values espoused by the company’s leader. It works like triangulation.”

Practicing virtue facilitates the development of an organizational culture in which the value of love is appreciated and even encouraged:

“It is about building company values that are in line with what is love. And what are those values? The value of participation, the value of the pursuit of the good, the value of finding solutions that work for all stakeholders and not only for the board, the search for honesty, sincerity, and good practice.”

The values that the organization chooses to protect will influence the selection among available modes, means, and ends of action. They become a motivational force that influences disposition to act in a good, moral way.

Virtuous Agents

The two previous categories were interpreted as *sources* of love. A third second order theme, **included in the overarching dimension of virtue-oriented organization**, described the *process* of diffusing love through *virtuous agents*. When love is represented as part of the organization's culture, virtuous agents emerge as role models. Virtues are intrinsic qualities that make someone admirable (Crossan et al. 2013; Rego et al. 2012a). Significant universal virtues that are relevant to organizational and management practices include temperance, humanity, courage, wisdom, justice, and transcendence (Rego et al. 2012a). Virtue is not observable as a reified thing but is rather expressed via the repeated practice of character strengths, the exercise of rectitude (justice, truth, transparency and respect), availability to others (emotionally, physically, spiritually), and a willingness to recognize and be aware of others' needs.

The ability of an organization to express a virtue-orientation relates to the ability of its agents to express love, making its presence visible through action. As such, virtues of justice, truth, respect, and transparency lead to what participants identified as rectitude, an expression of love in organizations: "When we refer to love in management it has to do with rectitude, since we're part of one another, and others are also part of us." Input from our informants echoes the process described in the literature as ethical decision-making, since what counts as good or bad, right or wrong, should be derived from a careful analysis of the perceived costs and benefits of a given course of action (Crossan et al. 2013). As one respondent put it, "[Love] is an enabler of better, shared, and understandable decisions, both internally and externally, that enhances the organizational climate and morale of the company, I think there certainly is a tendency for people to be more productive."

Virtuous agency has also been associated with acknowledging the role that others play in organizational successes: "[Love in organizations is] to live all success together, recognizing that success is the product of us all." As one respondent summarized:

“If I manage with love I'm not going to be less productive... no, the organization will adapt. It turns out that what I'm getting into is not just more labor cost, a little more expensive: I'm getting to something that is virtuous (...). And is this virtuous? Yes, because decisions are better, because I incorporate all the factors as I have a company that is not only concerned with immediate maximization where others do not matter. [...] So my point is that love is something that is always virtuous.”

The three categories above led us to create our first overarching dimension: *virtues-orientation*. At the *individual level*, the personal dispositions (such as educational, religious, and spiritual dimensions) constitute the foundations of virtue, which provides a moral reference (values) that exerts internal pressure to act virtuously. Within such normative enactments, staff express love to conform to collective expectations, which can be seen as an aspect of the stabilizing effects of organizational culture (Barsade and O'Neill 2014). The ability to (display acts of) love thus draws on example and role modeling, supporting the view that the exercise of love is learnt through practice. A virtue-oriented organization evaluates the costs and benefits of a decision based on universal principles of duty and obligation, using the rectitude of virtues to guide moral decisions (Crossan et al. 2013).

Second Overarching Dimension: Community-oriented Organization

Community-oriented organization is the dimension we use to categorize interviewee comments stressing the importance of balancing communal and individual goals that facilitates the emergence of organizations as human communities.

Organization as Community Spirit

An initial second order theme for this overarching dimension is the idea that the *organization is a human community of work*. According to informants, one predictable indication of love as an organizational factor was that people should come before profits. Profits are seen as very important but profit maximization was not represented as the ultimate goal. As articulated by Mackay (2011,

p. 17) “Just as people cannot live without eating, so business cannot live without profits. But most people don’t live to eat, and neither must business live just to make profit.” Valuing the other at a fundamental level, giving them a free choice, having an accurate understanding of the needs and feelings of another, requires emotional engagement by bosses and managers who assume that generosity is an important requirement of their role (Grant 2013).

Feeling love elicits an “other-centered” frame, i.e., a focus on other people, which leads employees to see themselves as interdependent members of a collective (Markus and Kitayama 1991). Love can be represented as an other-focused emotion, where interdependence and sensitivity toward the other is promoted (Gonzaga et al. 2001). Feelings of interdependence and collectivism operationally define a propensity to cooperate. Yet, paradoxically, business must also be competitive. Interviewees mentioned that being competitive without losing a sense of community was an important dual goal for community-oriented organization:

“Everyone feels that what the company has become, is somehow part of, that person’s contribution. Therefore every member of the organization is proactive because he knows what she does will become the organization’s bottom line.”

Respondents also underlined the importance of co-responsibility and the common good: “love implies we are part of each other and are co-responsible for what will become the common good.” With love, a firm becomes a community of individuals, sharing economic, relational, and ethical expectations and objectives (Cunha et al. 2013). A participant stated:

“The logic of love goes further than the well-behaved and considerate manager. It is a culture (created in the company) of complicity, co-responsibility, mutual concern, sharing objectives and interests, availability to listen to the needs of others, their circumstances, those from the company itself, and even to be willing to suffer together.”

Another respondent pointed out:

“The positive consequences [of love] seem to me very evident. I think the fact that it is possible to achieve a level of reciprocity, adherence, superior bonding towards others, less transactional and more emotional ... It is a higher level of relationship and of performance.”

Community-oriented organizations are more sustainable than their impersonal counterparts, for they consider the interests of the surrounding generalized others. Such consideration, respondents argued, is critical for an organization’s success, which may depend on its deep and constructive engagement with communities: “[the organization] has to look after its people, the market, clients, suppliers, stakeholder, shareholder so that it all becomes more trustworthy.” This reasoning echoes Pfeffer (2010), who links love and human sustainability, such as mentioned by one CEO:

“In a moment of great crisis, even with many social dramas, I think this concept of love works well when combined with the theme of sustainability. In business, nowadays, we have to realize that it is not enough to make a great result this month (...) it is better to win less and still be here in ten years because it means that people will have their jobs in the coming future. Sustainability is an important issue and love is an important factor for sustainable decision making in companies.”

Focusing on high quality connections (Dutton 2014), with emotions being part of mundane organizational affairs, makes people feel a stronger bond with, as another respondent put it, “the community, with membership to the company, with the alignment with management objectives and the company’s mission.” Another interviewee, who was concerned that engagement with technology was replacing engagement with people, further expressed the importance of connecting at a human level as follows:

“Today we live in a world that is highly competitive and people hardly talk to each other. I wonder if you noticed but in large companies, with many employees, we even lost the habit of greeting the doorman. People get hooked to their mobile now, dispatch an email when they leave home, not to waste time and thus there is a total dehumanization of relationships of people in business.”

Community-oriented organizations demonstrate respect and appreciation for employees: “[love becomes] humanism, a sign of great respect for human relations”, which translates into a culture of respect and justice for individual members. Organizational claims that they consider people to be their number one asset are tested in times of crisis. In community-oriented organizations, employees perceive tangible support and compassion from the organization particularly in times of difficulty. Rules of social exchange in a context of emotional reciprocity, such as those cultivated by love, result in balanced relationships between the organization and its members, forming a sense of communal belonging. In organizations with a community infrastructure, employees know that help and support are available when needed (Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002). Again, as a respondent put it: “so that my staff feels that they have found in me a partner, willing to help, to serve, not to judge but to seek solutions.” Comments of this type help to explain that some iconic organizations, such as IDEO, which self-represents as a peer-oriented meritocracy (Hargadon and Sutton 1997), manage explicitly to create a culture of helping (Amabile et al. 2014) and foster the “collective genius” (Hill et al. 2014).

Experiential Positivity

Experiential positivity is the label ascribed to a further second-order theme, drawing upon Ghoshal and Bartlett (1999). Balancing the community perspective with love for the person as uniquely singular requires persons to be respected for their individuality. Goffee and Jones (2013) emphasize the importance of respecting individual singularity as one of the significant traits of positive workplaces. As one participant noted:

“Love is put into practice when we give each other space to be active in business, to formulate their ideas, to present solutions, to have space in the company, to experience the company, so that we give to each member the opportunity to imprint the company's DNA.”

The dimension of individuality is captured by the notion reported by participants that those that manage with love have the responsibility for appreciating people as they are. Another respondent commented:

“Because [love] values people for what they are and it makes people feel good where they are, they feel loved where they are. And when I’m loved I free my inner self to focus much more on the other. I’m much more available to love others and relate to them on an equal basis. This would not happen in an organization where I need to prove myself.”

An implication of such *individualized corporations* consists in providing personalized solutions that afford opportunities for members to grow:

“To manage with love is to realize that each person who comes to work with us comes to our care... For example if I have a mentally disabled person I cannot expect him/her to program in Excel, but I can ask him/her to do his/her best in sweeping the courtyard ... I’ll direct that person to contribute what s/he can do best, that his/her role is crucial for the organization.”

Individualized consideration is a relevant ingredient for managing with love, seeing difference as a force of collective strength rather than as a limitation:

“What I see [when love is present] is that when people turn to the others they become greater. When people respect individual differences they broaden their horizons and capabilities.”

Organization Positivity

Organization positivity is the second order theme characterizing those cultures that emphasize individual dignity, respect for human [rights](#), encouraging the capacity for personal growth, care and service towards individuals, along with decision-making and management for the common good (Melé 2003). As one informant explained:

“I think the great thing about love in business is to bring back humanization of business. Organizations need to be re-humanized, people have to be able to share some affection since such affections are the basis for love and it gives meaning to what comes after. In the past, corporate culture was transmitted by older employees to those who entered and trainees had someone who was a kind of tutor, who directed them within the company and taught them the company culture. Nowadays we have global companies, especially the large telecommunications companies where everything is done by messages that are not fostering a culture that will not be sustainable in the long term, because people lost the affective part of the company, love.”

As an overarching dimension, *community orientation* articulates the above categories and can be described as denoting organizations with a strong community orientation. Love in organization may help align actions with a number of positive assumptions (Heynoski and Quinn 2012) including the focus on the common good (rather than narrow self-interest), the search for improvement (rather than a preference for the status quo), and the nurturing of organizational virtue. Practices such as these are critical for Aristotle’s view of the fundamental obligations of a leader: to create an environment that allows the expression of every organizational member’s potential (Lancione and Clegg 2014).

IMPLICATIONS

Love, as a performative form of normativity, has been under-theorized and under-researched within the organizational context (Barsade and O’Neill 2014). We have investigated love as an organizational phenomenon in terms of generalized love as represented by the words of a sample of experienced top managers. In particular, by working with a sample of Christian managers, for whom love plays a central role, we were able to build an archetypical image of the expression of love in organizations. According to our respondents, love, as an organizational construct, covers two main dimensions involving a virtue-orientation and a focus on organization as community. From this, we

can extract a number of implications for theory and practice, along with some avenues for future research.

In terms of implications for practice, the study indicates that managers' notions of cultures of love are ones that seek to deliberately cultivate virtuosity. Cultures of virtuosity depend critically upon example and role models; the practice of leadership virtue can provide the foundation for the development of trust, care, and consideration. Research on virtues indicates that when organizations neglect virtuosity, they are more vulnerable to unethical behaviors, exposing themselves to risks that could otherwise be avoided (Rego et al. 2012a). These implications further support the need articulated by other authors, to recover the themes of virtuous leadership (Crossan et al. 2013; Flynn 2008), organization as community (Pfeffer 2007), virtue ethics (Whetstone 2001), and virtue informed reflective reasoning or judgment (phronesis) in management education.

In terms of theory, our study indicates that virtue can constitute a path to the exploration of topics at the crossroads between business ethics, leadership, engagement and wellbeing. Respondents also associate love with meaning and happiness. Individuals may experience meaningfulness in their jobs when the organization is perceived as cultivating virtue and community. Fostering and sustaining a sense of community, building expressive *Gemeinschaft* in the midst of instrumental *Gesellschaft*, characterizes the desires of the respondents. Mintzberg (2009) uses the term "community-ship" to explain how organizations may balance individual motives with collective goals. Our results suggest that managerial conceptions of love, while still being instrumental in orientation, can be a powerful antidote against individualism and narrow managerialist ideas about the role of organization. The development of the idea of the organization as community can be a lever to try and foster high quality connections pervaded by love as an effective basis for neo-normative control.

Overall, it seems quite in order to suggest that our respondents were scoping a path first marked out by the great nineteenth century sociologist, Ferdinand Tönnies (1957) in distinguishing the specificity of *Gemeinschaft*, referring to groupings based on feelings of togetherness and mutual bonds, relations that are regarded as a desiderata in their own right with members being means for achieving this outcome. For Tönnies, however, such relations would not characterize the modern organization but would be the relations typical of a pre-modern family or community.

LIMITATIONS AND BOUNDARY CONDITIONS

The study was designed in a manner that established clear limitations and boundary conditions. First, we explored generalized love as an organizational phenomenon from the perspective of top managers, for whom its normative performativity was a matter of conviction. Irrespective of these convictions, the sample may have elaborated self-serving explanations (“people love to feel good about themselves – the self-enhanced motive...”; Pfeffer 2015, p. 180) other organizational members may well see the process differently. Previous research shows that employees may perceive demonstrations of care as an in-role obligation (Togel et al. 2013). Hence, what managers frame as love, employees may perceive as work, pure and simple, in which bosses and managers may seek to tighten the bonds while employees seek to keep them loose. Managing with love may well be a mere instrumental and manipulative way to make employees “fall in love” with their companies without genuine and substantive reciprocity occurring. In short: “roses” may be used manipulatively as a way to avoid paying “bread” and to cover management tactics of vassalage with a citizenship narrative. Future research on both managers’ and employees’ attitudes to work in the same organizations should address the issue of reciprocity.

Second, because we explored our research question through a sample with religious convictions, it raises questions relating to the generalizability of the findings. As we have explained, we did so for reasons of purposive sampling, both to create a consistent and rich picture, and to

build an idealized or archetypical image of love in organizations. More research is necessary to explore whether the results are idiosyncratic to the sample or if they are to be found more generally (e.g. how would findings differ in contrasting samples such as agnostic or atheist managers). Additionally, given that previous research has indicated that religion matters for the understanding of organizational behavior (Chan-Serafin et al. 2013), further research may also test how strong religious beliefs have an impact on the actions of leaders and their effectiveness in terms of the topics specifically addressed in this study. What would be important would be a systematic sampling across the major world religions construed as independent variables (Clarke 2009).

Third, love may be seen as positive but it can also be a “poisoned chalice”. Organizations may create cultures of (pseudo) love that are oppressive, forcing undue emotional work upon people in order to express emotions that they do not necessarily feel authentically. Sectarian cultures are particularly liable to force these forms of expressiveness on to their members, sometimes to the extent of “brainwashing” members through conversion processes (Snow and Machalek 1984). Loving the organization too much may lead to a loss of opportunities for fulfillment in other parts of life, including personal relations. If the bonds of organization tighten too much, a total institution may result (Clegg et al. 2006).

Fourth, Tönnies’ theorized that in the *Gesellschaft* rational self-interest and calculating conduct would weaken the characteristics of the *Gemeinschaft*. Today, however, organizations that espouse love as their creed make human relations more personal and direct, more immediate and intense, despite these enterprises being rationally constructed in the interest of efficiency. There is a fusion of *Gesell-* and *Gemein-schaft*, in which top management, in the name of love, can expect individuals to commit to live, be and do as the organization demands, for just as long as it demands, loving its demands, feeding its emotions, emotionally responding to its feelings, moods and behaviors, living a positive organizational life—being disciples of love. What this means for those

so disciplined requires further investigation not just of those expressing love from the top but also experiencing its projections from below.

CONCLUSION

Within an archetypal image of the *loving leader*, based on a sample of Christian managers, we conclude that generalized organizational love was associated with two overarching themes. First, love has been associated with virtuosity, i.e. organizations express love through the practice of virtue. Leaders considered that they spread love by acting as positive role models guided by inner convictions. Second, managers associated organizational love with a spirit of community. The study, in summary, indicates that organizational love is a twofold process, whose expression lies at the core of organizational ethicality and positivity. Unaccounted for by respondents but recognized by poets and playwrights through the ages, however, is that love paradoxically accords both intense pleasure and intense pain, it is both pure and scandalous, and while it can liberate the human spirit, it is can also be devastating or, at the least, constraining. Within the organizational context, love is no less contradictory as it seeks to reconcile greater freedom through normative orientations with greater performativity in terms of self-discipline and control. In late modern society, it is indeed a sign of the times that Tönnies' (1957) nineteenth century glimpses of a pastoral past should haunt the construction of twenty first century organizational desiderata for a future perfect.

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