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The Four Types of Love in Family Law



(https://attorneymediate.wordpress.com/?attachment_id=702).

In May of 2014, I had the honor of being invited to a symposium sponsored by the Fetzer Institute (<http://fetzer.org>), a private operating foundation established in 1962 by John Fetzer. The Institute's mission is to "foster awareness of the power of love and forgiveness in the emerging global community." The conference was called "Divorce: What's Love Got To Do With It?"

For three days I worked with collaborative law colleagues from all over the world, exploring love, forgiveness and compassion in our work. Are these concepts appropriate for lawyers to even mention? Do they have a place in our discussions with clients? These issues and others were discussed throughout the conference.

This blog contains my realizations about love in family law, as a result of the issues we discussed at the conference.

The word "**love**" is attached to emotions, experiences, memories and misunderstandings that often cause disputes leading parties to seek out a family law professional. Because of this complexity, the definition of "love" may polarize those seeking to determine the role it plays in family law.

Grateful for my heritage, I find clarity in the Greek language, which offers four different words translated as "love," each with distinct nuances in their definitions. In my thirty plus years as a family lawyer and mediator (thecompassionatealliance.com), I have seen all four dimensions of love play out in my work.

"**Eros**" is the source of the word "erotic," and it describes love that is passionate, highly emotional and often electric. Eros is based on self-satisfaction and pleasure and has an intensity that is fueled by one's attraction to another. It is usually accompanied by sexual connection and scientists describe complex body chemistry affixed to erotic love.

Most relationships have eros at the outset, but in time it usually diminishes or becomes intermittent, leaving parties craving its return. “Why can’t we get that feeling back?” couples may ask bemoaning the fleeting nature of eros and reporting they are no longer “in love,” or have “fallen out of love,” with their partner as a result of its departure. When eros doesn’t return or it shifts to a different type of love, parties may want to sever relationships through family law interventions.

Sometimes a party has entered into a relationship with someone new, thus rediscovering eros, and they come to the family law conference rooms to move out of one relationship into another. Their current partner may be grieving, feeling betrayed and shattered, and the family law practitioner helps both parties make clear headed decisions while navigating their respective intense emotions.

“**Storge**” is a love based on the natural affection one has for husband, wife, child, or even a pet. Storge is built as family members are “doing life together.” It feels secure and comfortable and stems from receiving unconditional acceptance by family members, despite one’s defects and flaws.

In family law, storge has to be shuffled and realigned, as legal actions divide households. Most parents aren’t able to see their children as often as they’d like, sometimes causing them to fear loneliness and rejection. Finances are redistributed, often resulting in a shortage of money after considering all factors.

“Will the children reject me if I can’t provide for them as elaborately as the other parent, after this divorce?”

This fear of the shifting of storge can cause anxiety and a resultant recalcitrance in positions at the family law negotiation table. Skilled family law practitioners craft creative parenting arrangements and design financial realignment that sustains family security. Once the plans are in place, family members may be reassured and confident to move forward.

“**Phileo**” is a love grounded in affection or fondness and is the type of love one has in friendships. It is a “brotherly love” that often grows over time, and involves giving as well as receiving.

“We have become more like roommates,” is a common phrase from parties seeking to end their legal relationships, reporting that phileo is now prevalent. Couples who have lived in friendly phileo relationships report long stretches without physical connection, and they are rarely high conflict when they enter the family law environment. These clients often work productively through a mediator, or together in the same room in a collaborative divorce, moving smoothly out of marriages seeking “something more.”

Friends of couples transitioning out of relationships under any of these scenarios can have a great influence as a result of their phileo love. Research shows that the most common person approached for advice when a marriage is in trouble is a female friend, followed by a family member, then a male friend, then a coworker. [1] Accompany their friend to a legal consultation or mediation session these friends offering phileo can impact the outcome of a family law case through their “loving” advice and must be managed by the family law practitioner.

While navigating all of these complex dimensions of love, compassionate family law professionals are able to demonstrate the most noble type of love. “**Agape**” flows from our passion for the well being of others, which is often the reason we have given our lives to the practice of family law. Agape is fueled by our strong desire to recognize those who are suffering and to do what we can to alleviate that suffering through our skills and gifts in family law processes such as mediation and collaborative divorce.

Agape is not based on merit, circumstances, fault, or actions. It is dispensed to innocent victims in the stories we hear with the same intensity it is given to the unlovable, unkind, unresponsive, or seemingly unworthy. Through the healing balm of agape love, we unconditionally invite all who are involved in family law matters to find their highest selves at a time when they are wounded, confused, scared and broken.

Agape love guides practitioners to see the parties, the families, the friends, the lawyers, the therapists and all who are involved in the legal intervention as fellow human beings connected together on the journey of life, despite their stories or circumstances. Deep listening, empathy, compassion, minimizing blame, encouraging collaboration and introducing forgiveness, are the ways family law practitioners exude agape. Some of us may even mindfully present ourselves as vessels through which God’s own agape love can flow.

What does love have to do with family law? Love has *everything* to do with family law. By operating through love and recognizing it’s complexity, family law professionals delight in the joy and satisfaction of our work. We are able to connect with our fellow human beings in a way that leaves an indelible mark on their lives, and our own.

[1] 2014, The Doherty Relationship Institute, LLC (<http://dohertyrelationshipinstitute.com>)

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MESSAGE

5 thoughts on “The Four Types of Love in Family Law”

elementhealing says:

[January 4, 2016 at 12:51 pm](#) ([Edit](#))

This is a great post. I agree that in a family court love must be a part of the equation. Without it more damage would be done to an already broken situation.

Reply

attorneymediate says:

[January 4, 2016 at 3:13 pm](#) ([Edit](#))

Thank you! It seems counterintuitive but there is no question that love comes into play when people are transitioning out of a marriage or relationship. In times of heartache and conflict it's hard to remember there was once deep love. I see so many dimensions of love in the work that I do. Even in the high conflict cases.

Reply

elementhealing says:

[January 4, 2016 at 3:50 pm](#) ([Edit](#))

There must be days where that intense energy must wipe you out.

attorneymediate says:

[January 6, 2016 at 8:03 am](#) ([Edit](#))

It's difficult and taxing work to be sure, but it is so gratifying to help people with heart wounds. I feel really honored that people trust me to let me into their families and share their stories with me. There aren't a lot of places where we are safe to do that without judgment. Sitting with your lawyer is that place.

elementhealing says:

[January 6, 2016 at 10:00 am](#) ([Edit](#))

I am very glad for your clients that they found someone with such a loving heart. Are you an empath? I'm getting the feeling you are which would also make you very good at what you do!

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