



Photo by Hu Jun

# Truth about love: feeling or fact?

**Emma Leaning**

**I**s love a feeling or a fact? Recently I asked this question online and learned there are six definitions of love in the Greek language alone:

1. Eros: romantic, passionate love
2. Philia: intimate, authentic friendship
3. Erotoropia or ludus: playful, flirtatious love
4. Philautia: compassionate self-love
5. Pragma: committed, compassionate love
6. Agape: empathetic, universal love.

How can something so central to our existence, so needed and known, be so complicated?

Finish this sentence with any word you like: “Love is \_.”

I struggle. Do you?

Love — in its many forms — has been the stuff of thinkers, philosophers and writers for centuries. The famous psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud viewed love as a combination of sexual drive and the need for affection. Popular

philosopher Alain de Botton talks about how social norms shape our experiences of love, while Shakespeare explores the complexities of love through his characters.

Great, but none of that gets to the heart of my question. Do we feel love, or is love a fact?

In the name of fairness, let’s look at this from both sides:

Love is a feeling. It’s a complex and deep experience made up of affection, attachment and desire. While love involves actions and behaviors, they are born from emotion. Love is a response to the qualities of someone we care for and can evolve over time as circumstances change.

Sounds good. But what if love is a fact?

Love is more than an emotion, it’s a state that involves a commitment to another person. It’s a conscious choice even when feelings fluctuate. Love is a fact that can be measured through the quality of relationships and the effort put into them.

What do you think?

The easiest answer to my question

is that love is both. But that answer doesn’t interest me. It feels too simple for something so mysterious. Perhaps the problem is the question itself. I’m trying to shove something profound into one of two boxes.

Stuck, I did what any rational columnist would do and asked friends on WeChat to complete the same sentence I asked you moments ago. Answers ranged from “love is a verb” and “love is a decision” to “love is like indigestion.” I get them all. Love is something we decide to do with particular people, and inevitably we will suffer because of it, because we cannot love without suffering.

So where does this leave us? Given the breadth of work created about love and the diverse range of answers to my question, I have to assume love is not a universal experience. Sure, fortunate people around the world will feel love, but they will all feel love differently.

As a columnist, I’m determined to answer the questions I pose, and I rolled around with this one for weeks. I’m not the first person to do so. Love has been debated for centuries with no definitive

answer. Some argue love is mostly a feeling, other say that love is a state of being that exists beyond emotions.

Maybe the simple answer to my complicated question is annoyingly correct after all. Love is both a feeling and a fact. Love is an experience involving strong feelings but also a practice that requires effort. In other words, love is not just a feeling that happens to us, but a conscious, ongoing choice. Ultimately, whether love is a feeling or a fact, or both, is up to the individual. Some people will prioritize the emotional aspects of love while others will emphasize its practice.

Which takes us back to our incomplete sentence: “Love is \_.”

I wrote this essay in a coffee shop. While trying to suss what to say, I took a very long look around me. I saw baristas who were passionate about coffee and coffee lovers enjoying their time together. I thought of my husband, my dogs and the wonderful people who fill my life. I pictured Shanghai and being your columnist. All of this brought me to my answer.

Love is ... real.