



LUND UNIVERSITY

Master of Science Programme in Global Studies  
The Graduate School of the Faculty of Social Sciences  
Social Anthropology Major

# For the Sake of Love

*A study of attitudes and values among young Swedish women in cohabiting partnerships*

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# Abstract

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Sweden is often considered a global forerunner of family demographic shifts brought about by increasing individualization and globalization. While modern theories often depict a general movement away from romantic love sentiments and toward more rational, equal and casual exchanges and defamilization, feminist scholarship critiques the optimism of these claims in light of persisting structural inequalities. What these lines of thought often share is a common treatment of romantic love as a harmful lingering remnant of patriarchal dominance. This thesis explores how young Swedish women living in heterosexual cohabiting partnerships conceive of romantic love themselves in relation to their partnerships and other aspects of their lives including unemployment, uncoupling and first-time childbirth. Informants view romantic love sentiments to be an essential element in their partnerships, however they do so in ways that complicate and challenge conventional scholarship on contemporary “individualistic” partnerships. The study analyzes in-depth interviews and previous research across social and behavioral science disciplines relating to romantic love, gender norms, individualization, democratization of relationships and the newly articulated life stage of emerging adulthood.

**Keywords:** romantic love, individualization, equality, Sweden, emerging adulthood, social anthropology

# Acknowledgements

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This thesis would not have been possible without my informants, to whom I am forever grateful. I would like to first thank my inspiring supervisor Tova Højdestrand for her constructive guidance throughout the writing process. I would also like to thank my caring family and friends for their encouragement and support. Finally, I owe a large part of my introduction to Swedish language, culture and networks to Samhällsvetarkåren vid Lunds universitet, a student union that not only actively works to improve education quality for The Faculty of Social Sciences at Lund University but also facilitates fruitful collaboration and knowledge exchange between students across educational disciplines and cultural backgrounds.

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# 1. Introduction

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When late modern social theorists discuss romantic love, it is often portrayed as a traditional ideal or set of ideals which the contemporary West has either already left, or is on its way to leaving behind. Acknowledging romantic love as an important aspect in the lives and decisions of Swedish young women today complicates the scholarly depiction of contemporary Sweden, and evokes the question of how young Swedish women negotiate between romantic love sentiments and characteristics more commonly associated with “modernized” Swedish partnerships, namely individualization and related attitudes and ideals associated with rationality, emerging adulthood and equality. Correspondingly, this thesis embarks upon the following research questions:

1. *How do young Swedish women in cohabiting partnerships today conceive of romantic love in relation to their relationships, life decisions and futures?*
2. *How should these conceptions be handled in the light of existing theory?*

I undertake this investigation of romantic love in relation to, or conflict with, several intersecting influences found to be specifically relevant to the experiences of informants during the timespan of this study:

- a) values relating to individualized partnerships; primarily rationality, emerging adulthood and equality
- b) changing circumstances over time due to uncoupling and childbearing

In addition to contributing to the understanding of contemporary romantic love sentiments from the perspective of Swedish women in cohabiting partnerships, this thesis also considers corresponding causes, social functions and implications that such a conceptualization of romantic love involves. To aid in this, I continually relate my own research to research and theory across social and behavioral science disciplines relating to romantic love, gender norms, individualization and democratization of relationships and the newly articulated contemporary life stage of “emerging adulthood” (Fridkis 2011, Henig 2010).

## 1.2 Research Focus and Motivations

I initially entered the field with an aim to explore values and attitudes connected to individualization amongst young adults in cohabiting partnerships, aiming for an open approach which would allow my experience with informants to dictate a research focus. I became interested in the topic of romantic love specifically because romantic love was a topic continually discussed by young Swedish women and men I met in relation to their own aspirations and life choices, yet also deemphasized in many of the scholarly portrayals of contemporary Swedish society I had come across (e.g. Arpi 2010, Johansson 2000, Daun 1989).

I chose to focus specifically on young women with male domestic partners for several reasons. The increasing rate at which women delay and forgo familial roles indicates that women have had more difficulty simultaneously managing work life as well as familial and spousal roles than men (Bernhardt & Goldschneider 2007). Sociologists Eva Bernhardt, Calvin Goldschneider, Frances Goldschneider, and Gunilla Bjerén (2007) argue that unless the pressure to fulfill these roles is placed equally on men and women, the rates of marriage and parenthood will continue to dwindle. On the other hand, research suggests that processes of identity formation differ between young women and men in Sweden today, and that Swedish women more actively explore and reach a stage of identity achievement<sup>1</sup> earlier than men with regards to love relationships (Carlsson, *et al.* 2014, Frisèn & Wängvist 2010). This fueled my interest in studying the ways in which women's views on love and relationship interact with increasing individualization and decisions to put off marriage and childrearing. I also became interested in how women negotiate views and decisions within the context of heterosexual relationships, and how seemingly conflicting attitudes regarding romantic love (which scholars often associate with heteronormativity) and equality come into play. Which expectations, desires and decisions does a Swedish woman in a heterosexual partnership perceive as hers alone, which are negotiated between her and her partner, and which are not hers at all but affect her within her relationship? In reaction to this curiosity and in an effort to provide a narrower frame of study, I found it beneficial to limit my research to women's values and attitudes in their own right rather than discussing them in relation to men's.

I also chose to focus on women with higher educational backgrounds. I motivate this decision in part by referring to Swedish ethnologist Helen Brembeck's argument that educated women are an example of a group situated particularly near to the core of certain societal changes

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<sup>1</sup> Identity achievement is a psychological development term referring to a commitment to a particular identity following active exploration of alternatives. It is one of the four key Identity Statuses (Foreclosure, Identity Diffusion, Moratorium and Identity Achievement) identified by psychologist James E. Marcia (1979).

(Brembeck 1998, p. 16). The increasing pursuit of higher education amongst young people across the globe is considered a key aspect of “emerging adulthood,” a new life stage characterized by delaying marriage, parenting, and/or commitment to a stable job (Carlsson, *et al.* 2013, Frisèn & Wängvist 2010). I therefore found a focus on the values and attitudes of educated young adult women who were in cohabiting relationships, but were also unmarried and without children, to be a relevant societal group with which to focus a study of the interplay between romantic love and commitment ideals and seemingly conflicting circumstances related to individualization and emerging adulthood.

### **1.3 Disposition**

I begin by introducing and providing some background on theoretical conceptions of love and individualization, after which I focus on the interdisciplinary, theoretical outlook I have chosen for the purpose of this study. I follow this with a discussion of methodology, beginning with a description of the site, followed by a discussion of my methodological approach and research limitations, and ending with a description informants. The main body of this thesis consists of four chapters. The first explores informants’ conceptions of romantic love in the light of existing theories of love and individualization. The second presents and analyses informants’ views of their love relationships in relation to Swedish conceptions of rationality. The third situates informants’ views on love within the context of the newly articulated and increasingly global modern life stage of emerging adulthood. The fourth builds upon the previous chapters with a new focus on informants’ conceptions of love and equality in relation to love relationships, parenthood and breakups; and finally employs Donna Haraway’s (1991) theory of a cyborg to help explain informants’ transgression of boundaries and rejection of binaries connected to romantic love, committed partnership, equality, rationality and modernity. I end with a short conclusion summarizing the main discussions of the thesis and suggesting focuses for further research.

## 2. Theory

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### 2.1 Why Love?

According to Alfred Gell, a modern love narrative goes something like this: within a seemingly indefinite pool of persons of whom one has general knowledge, an individual connects to another based on mutual affinity (Gell 2011). Something about their connection feels right, mystical, and perhaps even destined. In a society where external forces such as family and religion have relatively little sway on individual agency and yet individuals are generally expected to achieve a monogamous, ideally life-long relationship, another external force comes into focus: love.

Yet social scientists have a long history of evading the subject of love in research regarding partnership, family, and work, or perhaps it is love that has evaded empirical research. A prime example of this is the absence of love as an explored factor in social and demographic research on the decision to marry (Amato 2007, Bernhardt, *et al.* 2010). According to sociologists Paul Amato and Eva Bernhardt, surprisingly little research examines the influence of romantic love on marriage, which Bernhardt asserts is likely to be the most important reason to marry in contemporary western societies (Bernhardt, *et al.* 2010). Instead, social research on the topic focuses on links between socio-economic factors and marriage decisions (*ibid*). While studies of socio-economic variables give great insight into the ways in which class and partnership intersect, they do not address the significance of love as one of the most prominent fixations of our modern world, and how such a fixation affects socio-economic decision-making.

Why the lack of socio-cultural theories addressing love? One reason is that cultural theorists have historically relegated emotion to the domain of natural and biological sciences, seeing emotions as, in the words of Catherine Lutz and Geoffrey White (1986) "relatively uniform, uninteresting, and inaccessible to the methods of cultural analysis". Since the 1970s, however, an increasing number of scholars of social science disciplines have argued that links be better recognized between emotion and culture (Geertz 1973, Rosaldo 1984, Lutz & White 1986, Illouz 1997, Millon 2003). However, most contemporary socio-behavioral research on emotion is based upon the fundamental priority of individual experience over social experience (Boellstorff & Lindquist 2004, Millon 2003, see Lutz & White 1986 for critique). The dominant social psychological approach even today, according to social and cultural anthropologists Tom



Boellstorff and Johan Lindqvist (2004), downplays cultural difference in emotion, pairing “methodological individualism with a theoretical universalism” (see also Millon 2003). One example of this is a study surveying emotion and gender within 37 countries spanning 5 continents which “found the anticipated effects of sex of respondent with respect to all three aspects of emotion (intensity, duration, and expression), showing that women in all countries reported more intense emotions, and of a longer duration, and that they also expressed their emotions more overtly’ (Fischer & Manstead 2000, Boellstorff & Lindqvist 1986).

This academic trend in “revealing” the universality of emotions can be seen specifically amongst some anthropologists in relation to romantic love (Jankowiak and Fischer 1992, Schiefenhövel 2009, see Edwards, *et al.* 2009 for critique of trend). The most resounding example of this came in the journal *Ethnography* in 1992 when, after investigating the Standard Cross Sample of 186 “cultures,” ethnographers William Jankowiak and Edward Fischer (1992), claimed that romantic love is near-universal, if not universal. This claim garnered the attention of popular media, leading to an article in *The New York Times* provocatively entitled “After Kinship and Marriage, Anthropology Discovers Love” depicting romantic love as a force in cultures across time and space, and a lack of anthropological work on the topic as reflective of an inability and unwillingness of anthropologists to see romantic love beyond its perceived connections to elites and the West (Goleman 1992). More recently, the claim found its way into papers in the *Journal of Neurophysiology* and the *Journal of Comparative Neurology* in 2005, stating the “universal” or “near-universal” nature of romantic love as fact, based upon Jankowiak and Fischer’s research (Aron, *et al.* 2005, Fisher, *et al.* 2005). Parallel to Jankowiak and Fischer’s claim, the articles also discuss cross-disciplinary studies using fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging) connecting images of a partner’s beloved to activation of “neural systems associated with motivation to require a reward,” similar to the use of cocaine, (Aron 2005: 332). Jankowiak, Fischer, Schiefenhövel, and other social and cultural anthropologists who subscribe to this trend view the new theoretical focus on love as an evolution of consciousness of sorts, both for the anthropological field and social theorists at large toward the recognition of romantic love as universal (Jankowiak and Fischer 1992, Schiefenhövel 2009, Goleman 1992, see Edwards, *et al.* 2009 critique).

On the other end of the spectrum are anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz (1973), Michelle Rosaldo (1984) and Catherine Lutz (1986, 1988) who claim through ethnographic analysis of cultural variation that emotion is sociocentric, situated entirely within the cultural realm. Geertz (1973) considers emotions to be “cultural artifacts” dictated by context and interpretation, and Rosaldo (1984) similarly claims that feelings are “not substances to be discovered in our blood

but social practices organized by stories.” Lutz (1988) contrasts what she sees as the Western conception of emotions as private, inner sensations to be suppressed to many other cultures in which she claims emotions are instead understood in terms of socially obligated reactions dictated by public relationships. While Geertz (1973), Rosaldo (1984) and Lutz (1986, 1988) make significant strides in the analysis of culture as a shaper of emotion psychological anthropologist, Charles Lindholm critiques them for failing to see past the social construction of emotional control (Lindholm 2007). Lindholm (1982, 2007), on the other hand, takes a middle road claiming that love, like any emotion surrounding human attachment (e.g. jealousy, separation anxiety), reflects universal human needs evolved from an instinctive desire to be close to caretakers, and yet the wide array of evidence suggests that emotions are neither infinitely malleable, nor totally cognitive, nor completely relational.

The more recent focus amongst anthropologists on love, and the disagreements amongst anthropologists in how to approach it, inspired an international anthropological debate in 2009 (Edwards, *et al.* 2009). More specifically, the debate set out to discuss social anthropologist Jeanette Edwards’ view that anthropology’s fixation with reciprocity leaves no room for the use of love as a theoretical tool for anthropologists, and that this was, in fact, not a “bad” thing (*ibid.*). While Edwards encourages the anthropological study of the diverse ways in which love can manifest itself, she critiques the trend among anthropologists like Jankowiak and Fischer (1992) to assert the authority to cross-culturally recognize, classify and determine the existence of “real” romantic love (Edwards, *et al.* 2009). Edwards questions whether this trend says more about anthropologists’ current state of being “in love with the idea of love” than anything else (*ibid.*).

Edwards’ criticisms depict anthropological study as currently ill-equipped to deal with many aspects of the study of love, and, while her co-debaters were quite evenly divided in their views of whether or not love should serve as a theoretical tool for anthropologists, the general consensus amongst debaters was that the anthropological space in which to speak about love today is challenging at best (*ibid.*). According to Lindholm (2006), anthropological reluctance to study love and contention over the extent to which love can be understood as a basic human emotion or a cultural manifestation all masks a problematic lack of a suitable language within anthropology to discuss the matter of love itself. From the standpoint of rational observer, an anthropologist runs the risk of explaining away love- that is, discussing reasons for its existence whilst simultaneously rendering it an illusion, devoid of truth (*ibid.*). The failure to recognize or convey actual experiences of love from an academic standpoint leaves it to poets and the general public to make sense of what exists within “love-worlds” in experiential terms (*ibid.*). Whether an anthropologist chooses to

engage in these “love-worlds” or attempts to rationalize them as a detached (borderline voyeuristic) observer, the investigator becomes, in the words of Lindholm, an “absurd figure” (ibid). Therefore, in recognition of the murky space in which anthropological study of love currently finds itself, Lindholm suggests that studies of the sort be undertaken with a “humbling sense of inadequacy of our language and the limits of our understanding” (Lindholm 2006). Yet, despite the heavy baggage that the anthropological study of love carries, or apter yet *because* of it, Lindholm encourages anthropologists of today to undertake the challenge:

*“Awareness of the knot of epistemic contradictions obscuring, distorting, transforming or denying the experience ought not to frighten us away, but rather should spark an interest in the serious study of romantic love”* (ibid).

## **2.2 Why Individualization?**

Late modern theorists Giddens (1991a, 1991b, 1992) Beck, Beck-Gernsheim (1995, 2002) and Bauman (2001, 2003) describe a rising global need for people in contemporary Western societies to construct their lives individually. Bauman sums up the concept of “individualization” as the transformation of human identity from “a 'given' into a 'task'”; a need to “*become* what one *is*” (Bauman's forward in Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2001). In other words, people are no longer born into their identities but must actively engage in a process of creating selfhood. One must make numerous life decisions that, up until recently, were governed by well-established societal rules or models. Structural economic changes associated with modernity, particularly in terms of paid employment and the development of the welfare state, have increasingly turned individuals into the basic units of production and consumption. This, in addition to cultural changes including the rise in secularization and the ideals of self-development and civil rights, are considered to be driving forces behind the growing self-actualization and reflexivity characteristic of individualization.

Giddens (1992), Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, (1995, 2002), and Bauman (2001, 2003) have analyzed the effects of individualization on relationship and familial structure in contemporary Western societies. When traditional bonds of family, class, religion, and marriage loosen, individuals are tasked with new challenges of continual identity negotiation, evaluation, and life planning. These challenges manifest themselves in various aspects of “modern” living including, to quite a profound extent, the norms and values associated with love and partnership.

Challenges by Lash and Adkins, supported and elaborated on by Banks and Milestone,

claim that individualization theory incorrectly assumes freedom from gender subscription (Banks & Milestone 2011). Instead, they suggest that individualization necessitates the construction of new traditions often drawing from older traditions rather than simply doing away with tradition altogether (ibid). The absence of women in specific work sectors and the uneven pressure cast on women to juggle careers and domestic labour, according to these Lash, Banks, and Milestone, are evidence against the idea that individualization necessarily breaks people's ties to tradition (ibid).

Banks and Milestone, however, do not refute the social relevance of the individualization thesis as a whole (ibid). It surely would be difficult to deny the impact of individualization on contemporary Western society, as an increasingly widespread ideal in very the least. While verbal inconsistencies, simplifications, and a deemphasis of traditional forces (in particular gender discrimination) still at work should be duly noted in the work of Bauman (2003), Giddens (1992), Beck, and Beck-Gernsheim (1992, 1995), I assert that the individualization thesis is a useful theoretical tool when attempting to understand social and cultural changes brought about by globalization, institutionalized welfare, and the informational age. That said, I will also draw upon previous theoretical critique of (and empirical contradictions to) the individualization thesis, particularly in relation to Giddens' "pure relationship" theory, to be elaborated upon in later sections. I base this critique on the ways in which romantic love relates to rationality, equality, and characteristics of emerging adulthood (i.e. defamilization, detraditionalization) in the lives of informants, which is often a far messier and less linear process than late modern theories suggest.

Social scientists of today have now turned their attention toward the increasingly pertinent question of how to navigate culture's effect on emotional identity in a world marked by an increase in transnational processes and disconnection between culture and physical place (Gupta & Ferguson 1997, Boellstorff & Lindqvist 2004). Some research into the study of married and cohabiting couples suggest that global trends of individualization and defamilization may strengthen the importance of love and intimacy (Bernhardt, Noack, & Wiik 2010, Gell 2011). Social anthropologist Alfred Gell goes so far as to suggest that romantic love may in fact be "structurally essential" to modern, individualistic societies (Gell 2011). Sociologist Eva Illouz, whose research on US American couples focuses on where she sees "culture and economy meet and intersect with love," claims that the spread of both capitalism and individualism strongly affect modern couples' decision making, future aspirations and conceptions related to love and romance (Illouz 1997). While Illouz (ibid) recognizes that drawing relationships between love and modern systems isn't new (i.e. influential theorists including Engels, Marx, Fromm and Marcuse have critiqued the effect of capitalism on love), she asserts that attempts to impact the contemporary view on love by revealing its institutionalized aspects and unequal actors have largely failed,

making love “one of the most important mythologies of our time.”

However, some researchers today stress the notion that Swedish society in particular has actually possessed quite similar ideas of love in the past as exist today, more similar, at least, than is often presented or assumed. Historian Annika Sandén, for example, refers to seventeenth century Swedish church documents issuing divorces to civilians on emotional grounds such as the inability of a partner to comfort her spouse and a coerced marriage which kept one parishioner from marrying the woman he truly loved (Sandén 2003). Some anthropologists and historians have also argued that ordinary people in Northern Europe have in fact preferred a romantic base regarding matters of family, property, and courtship from as early as the thirteenth century (Lindholm 2007). While this trend seems to correspond with the increasing scholarly recognition of “love” as a factor in decision making, it also proceeds to question the extent to which popular arguments made by late modern social theorists such as Bauman (2003), Giddens (1992), Beck, and Beck-Gernsheim (1992, 1995) for recent, dramatic shifts in the significance of love reflect the situation in Sweden. Economic historians Dribe and Lundh take a more moderate approach, asserting that socio-economic status, although “less important [to marriage choice in Swedish history] in reality than is often assumed,” was certainly a more rigid determinant of live choices in pre-industrial Sweden than today and, consequently, guided relationship aspirations and decisions to a much larger extent (Dribe & Lundh 2010).

### **2.3 Theoretical Outlook**

For this study, I find it beneficial to draw upon social anthropologist Alfred Gell’s (2011) theories of romantic love to better understand the apparent mystery and enchantment connected to romantic love in contemporary Sweden. Harkening sociologist Georg Simmel’s (1906) situating of love and marriage within a larger discussion of secrecy and the distribution and manipulation of information, the anthropological theory of love put forth by Gell (2011) creates a single space for both reciprocity and love by embedding love within a broader discussion of individual’s abductive reasoning based upon one’s “informational universe” in an article published first in 1996 in the French anthropological journal *Terrain*. In it, Gell claims that love and “social knowledge” are inherently connected, a relationship that may stem from what evolutionary psychologists call “machiavellian” intelligence; put simply, higher primates’ ability to manipulate information and conceal behavior, particularly of a sexual nature (Gell 2011, see Byrne & Whiten 1988 for overview of “machiavellian” intelligence). Gell (2011) envisions societies as “informational

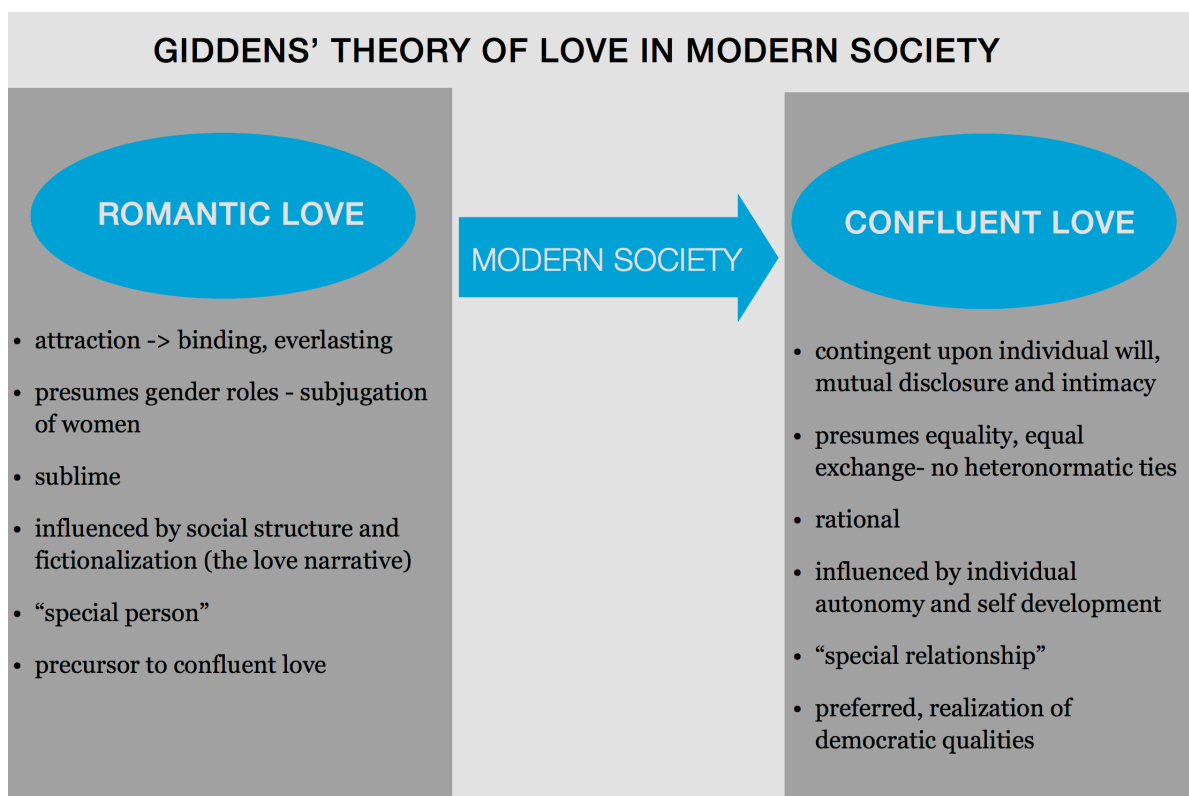
universes” whose manifestations of love can be predicted, to a point, according to how social information (i.e. information about other people) is structured and distributed amongst the society’s individuals. Perhaps most individuals within a society possess and have access to reliable general information about a large mass of relative strangers (including possible future love partners) as is the case amongst the Swedish middle-class, or maybe a society has access to less general knowledge of others and greater specific knowledge of a few, as Gell characterizes the Umeda society of New Guinea’s Sepik District (ibid). For the Umedas, Gell claims romantic love as constructed within the modern western imaginary, that is, “with a relative stranger whom one chooses, out of all the possible candidates, as the one to love,” had “only one possible context of occurrence [...] one-sided adultery between an unmarried boy and a married woman” (Gell 2011).

Correspondingly, Gell sees “modern” romantic love as strongly influenced by defamilization and expanding knowledge systems (ibid). Given the lack of external marriage rules, romantic love becomes an increasingly essential tool for social bonding in societies like contemporary Sweden (ibid). And yet, the confidentiality of information between one and one’s beloved, which Gell asserts is and have always been fundamental to romantic love, creates an inherent lack of first-hand knowledge among people as to how friends, neighbors, even family members construct their intimate “love-worlds”, necessitating these individuals to turn largely to fictional and narrative references for information which reinforce the depiction of love as passionate, special and destined (ibid).

In this study, however, I do not intend to reduce the feeling of love to mere illusion or fiction propagated by the globalization of popular culture. Much of the work of psychologists and neurologists speaks to the contrary (Lindholm 2007). Instead, I assert that differing cultural attitudes toward feelings trigger different understandings and experiences of them (Lutz 1986, Lindholm 2007). I also contend that while Gell (2011), like Giddens (1992), stresses love as grounded in the intimate sharing of information, it is important to also recognize the significance of love and compassion as tools for nurturance, bonding people through shared feeling and mutual care as evidenced by ethnographic studies of societies both in and outside the traditionally classified “modern west” (Lutz 1986, Lindholm 2007). In the context of this study, I particularly relate the influence of social context to how informants understand romantic love in relation to values of equality, rationality and self-hood and emerging adulthood.

Furthermore, I discuss informants’ views of love in relation to and in opposition with Giddens’ (1992) theoretical understanding of romantic love, confluent love, individualization and pure relationship. Like Gell (2011), Giddens finds mutual disclosure to be the foundation of modern intimacy, however, he sees modern society as moving away from romantic notions of love

and toward at the late-modern “pure relationship” model (ibid). “Pure relationship” refers to an intimate arrangement lasting only as long as both partners remain satisfied with the intimacy it supplies, and is praised by Giddens for being more egalitarian and democratic (ibid). It positions the individual as the fundamental and autonomous unit in the relationship, satisfied only until the relationship is no longer self-fulfilling, after which the union should be dissolved in anticipation of a sea of new potential suppliers of love and intimacy to be found elsewhere. The women’s movement, according to Giddens, is primarily responsible for a transformation from romantic love to confluent love to better suit the pure relationship model (ibid).



**Figure 1.** Interpretation of Giddens’s (1992) description of the movement from romantic love to confluent love.

At seemingly further odds with a romantic love ideal is the image of the “rational” and “equal” Swede. Rationality and equality are continuous themes within ethnographic descriptions of Sweden and “Swedish mentality” (Daun 1989, Åkerblom & Holmberg 2008). Furthermore, the results of attitudinal surveys have consistently placed Sweden among the nations with the strongest rational and secular values (Inglehart & Welzel 2010). Making reference to Giddens’ description of “pure relationship,” social psychologist Thomas Johansson describes the existence of a new form in relationship structure in Sweden, particularly the middle class, as taking a “rational approach” rather than a traditional or romantic love approach (see Arpi 2010 for overview). In keeping with

Giddens' "pure relationship model" (1992), Johansson also connects Sweden's late modern relationship structure with greater equality between women and men (Arpi 2010). To support his claims that Sweden has moved to an increasingly individualized, democratized relationship structure, Johansson cites the increase in divorce rates in Sweden during the 60s and 70s and insists that the 70 percent of Swedes who *do* live within heterosexual, nuclear families do so for "rational" reasons relating to personal emotional, intellectual, economic and social gains (Arpi 2010). In this study, I assess Giddens' (1992) and Johansson's (2010) claims regarding romantic love, rationality, equality and contemporary Swedish relationship structure in opposition to views of informants which often reflect seemingly contradictory commitments to multiple ideals and senses of self, in addition to secondary data and critique in the light of feminist theory (i.e. Haraway 1991, Jamieson 1999).

Finally, I relate informants' views to Donna Haraway's call for the need of a common language to explain our contemporary social world, one which both denies essentialisms and encourages theoretical discussion of social reality (1991). I do this in part as a response to a related problem articulated by Lindholm (2006) of the scholar of romantic love as stuck between trying to speak the "common language of love, which is either ethereal (to those 'in love') or hypocritical (to cynics), or else speak the cool and detached language of science, which is incongruously inconsistent with what the lover's heart feels, or is said to feel." Haraway explains her call through the metaphor of a "cyborg," whose existence has been made possible through the twentieth century breakdown of rigid boundaries between human and animal, human and machine, and material and immaterial (ibid). Haraway describes the cyborg, a contemporary entity whose hypocritical state of being as both human and machine is largely unquestioned today, as "resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity," and the "cyborg world" as a utopic space in which contemporary society can be discussed in a way that is unhinged from politically loaded theoretical essentialisms of the past (ibid). In addition to suggesting that Haraway's theory could serve as a useful tool for thought in the dualistic dilemma presented by the study of romantic love, I also assert that Haraway's theory better reflects the situation of contemporary Swedish women from the perspective of informants themselves. As will be illustrated, theoretically defined conflicts between, for example, emotion and rationality and romantic love and equal love often fail to resonate with informants. Instead, informants' depictions of themselves, their partnerships and love itself better reflect the "profusion of spaces and identities and the permeability of boundaries" emphasized in Haraway's model (1991). I therefore claim that Haraway's (1991) destabilization of dualistic conceptual themes through her cyborg model helps to explain contemporary love



relationships in Sweden in which partners often reflect an affinity for multiple senses of selves and understandings of love simultaneously and across time.

### 3. Methodology

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*The underlying (and probably unconscious) assumption is that the use of rational reason will destroy irrational feeling. In other words, studying love may cause its absence, and so should be avoided [...] Scholarly reluctance is increased by the way romantic love is imagined to be a transcendent experience that, by its very nature, resists any rational analysis, (Lindholm: 2006, p.8).*

The research conducted for this study is qualitative and consists of a combination of semi-structured, in depth interviews and participant-observation taken place in the cities of Lund and Malmö in southern Sweden over two 8-week periods, one period in 2010 and the other in 2013 during which I resumed contact with the same informants. Revisiting the topics of romantic love and partnerships with the very same informants after two years enabled reflection by both myself and the informants over changes in experience, views, and senses of self.

While I respect, admire and strive for a level of dedication and competence within a select educational discipline, I share Campbell's call for an increase in interdisciplinary bridges and allowing room for a "pattern of inevitably incomplete competence [to] cover areas neglected by others" like "fish scales" overlapping yet branching out into seldom traversed matrices between specialty clusters (Campbell 1969). As an anthropological focus on love is fairly new and the language with which to address it still is distinctively controversial within the field, I find it especially pertinent to approach the topic with an interdisciplinary and open mindset, drawing secondary research material from various social and behavioral science disciplines including but not limited to sociology, psychological anthropology, and social psychology.

I also incorporate some short selections of contemporary Swedish artistic expressions of love (i.e., song lyrics, a graphic novel) that I find correspond thematically with chapter topics, whilst largely letting the works speak for themselves. I do so not only because art can be seen as a bridge between individual and community experience (Dewey 1958), but also in an effort to reflexively remind readers that social scientific attempts to study romantic love straddle both empirical and emotional domains and are therefore both limited and interpretive. Surely, the same can be said for any social scientific attempt to explain or rationalize transcendental experience. Furthermore, according to Gell, fiction and love are inextricably linked and so inclusion of artistic reference points, in addition to a focus on informants' personal love narratives, are humble efforts

to avoid the absurdity of completely “removing the poetry from the experience” of romantic love through ethnographic interpretation (Lindholm: 2006).

### **3.1 The Site**

The municipalities of Malmö and Lund are located in Sweden’s southernmost county of Skåne and are distanced about 15 kilometers from one another. Their mutual accessibility, particularly by train, fosters strong patterns of commute by locals between cities for purposes of work, leisure and education. While Malmö is Sweden’s third largest city (with a population of approximately 300,000) and a commercial hub of the southern region, Lund is perhaps best known today for Lund University, one of Scandinavia’s largest institutions for higher education and research with approximately 42,000 students. Residents of Malmö and Lund are also at an easily accessible commuter distance (between 30 and 50 minutes by train) to Denmark’s capital city of Copenhagen.

While Malmö and Lund differ considerably in terms of demographics, they are both urban settings, house higher educational institutions and large groups of students, graduates and practitioners of higher education, and each possess, albeit in varying ways, a distinctly cosmopolitan air. Many of the study’s informants have resided in both cities, for instance having lived in Lund during a portion of their studies and moved to Malmö to continue studies or find work, or vice versa. Informants regard both Lund and Malmö as cities in which educated young people congregate for pursuits of self-fulfillment and development related to education and career.

### **3.2 Approach and Limitations**

The methodological approach of this study is grounded in my belief in the importance of a discussion of social reality and simultaneous commitment to the understanding that these discussions are inherently limited and effected by the researcher’s positioning in relation to the field. According to Donna Haraway, positioning is “the key practice in grounding knowledge organized around the imagery of vision” (1988). I therefore discuss my approach in relation to my position as researcher and the corresponding limitations of this study.

The approach and scope of the study is limited in part by accessibility, particularly regarding the daily, lived experience of informants’ cohabiting partnerships. The limits of accessibility primarily come down to a matter of ethics and risk/benefit analysis regarding the extent to which I, as a researcher, felt comfortable attempting to enter private or personal realm of

informants' domestic partnerships during my time active in the field. Especially in the study of love relationships, an ethnographic researcher runs the risk of "engaging in a bit of keyhole peaking" in the words of Lindholm (2006). However, to the extent to which I was able to conduct the approach, I found participant observation to be very beneficial in strengthening my familiarity with the day-to-day life of informants and the interactions between informants and their partners. A recollection that comes to mind is helping an informant and her partner move into a new apartment, a rather stressful several day process during which I felt my role as researcher become increasingly uninteresting and unnoticed allowing me to gain greater insight into the lives of informants whilst making a very practical contribution.

Given my assurance of anonymity, I found informants to be not only willing but eager to discuss their domestic partnerships and thoughts on love at length, leading much of the data to be gathered by means of semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Indeed, ethnographic approaches are often subject to pragmatics and ethical concerns leaving it up to the researcher to constantly evaluate their position, remain flexible and react accordingly (Crang & Cook 2007). The semi-structured nature of interviews allowed for both the discussion of topics related to the study's initial aims in addition to new study focuses to come to the forefront, the most obvious of these being romantic love. I strove to avoid leading questions primarily through formulation of questions, asking how situations come about and encouraging narratives. I attempted to discuss general attitudes and values using the language in which informants took up themselves, for example informants made their own reference to equality and gender roles but not individualization and so my discussion of informants in relation to individualization is largely interpretive. Also important to mention regarding my position in relation to language use is the fact that interviews were characterized by a flexible mix of Swedish and English language dictated by context, nuance and mutual intelligibility. Given the situation that I myself am a native English speaker with knowledge of Swedish and my informants native speakers of Swedish with good knowledge of English, I found the most effective strategy to be to encourage informants to speak in their first language of Swedish and to switch speaking in English if I found my vocabulary lacking. I also found it vital to be persistent in revisiting any word, phrase, or topic which I sensed may have resulted in confusion or misunderstanding due to language.

An important result of stronger reliance on semi-structured interviews than participant observation is that the study is somewhat reserved in its exploration of discrepancies between what informants say and what they do. Instead, the study examines to a greater extent the ways in which informants conceive of their lives and actions, and how these conceptions interact and change over time and depending upon circumstance in an effort to as Clifford Geertz describes "take the capital

letters off of” broad assumptions and “grand realities” of (for example) love, equality, and rationality provided by various approaches outside of anthropology (1973). Furthermore, I found that placing this weight on informants’ own conceptualizations was a beneficial approach for the reason that experiences with love relationships are personal and culturally specific, but also arguably quite commonplace, potentially striking “close to home” even amongst some of the most rational empiricists. I will discuss the ironies of this later on in the body of this work, but it suffices to say now that many academics over their lifetime, myself included, have encountered either first or second hand personal experience with an emotional state that one has likened to “love,” therefore I have attempted to approach my research with constant reflexivity and deliberation.

### **3.3 Informants**

The informants for this study, and those referred to directly within this paper, are six young women (*Ida, Maja, Tora, Simone, Emilie, and Jenny*<sup>2</sup>). These women all come from middle class backgrounds with Swedish-born parents, are unmarried and childless and live in heterosexual partnerships. All of these women have chosen to pursue higher education, which they consider to be a natural choice. While four informants have attained higher educational degrees, the other two are currently working to complete them. Originally from the counties of Småland, Blekinge and Skåne, informants currently reside in either Malmö or Lund and have all done so for a minimum of three years. Three of the informants are acquaintances with one another, however none consider themselves to have regular contact with one another. Initial contact with these informants came through second-degree connections made possible with the help of work colleagues, classmates and friends.

Informants were all between the ages of 24 and 29 when I began my research, an age range characterized by what some behavioral scientists now refer to as the stage of “pre” and “emerging” adulthood (Fridkis 2011, Henig 2010). This newly articulated life stage, first recognized in Western Europe and North America, acknowledges a period during which young people from across the world increasingly delay or forgo rites of passage into adulthood such as marriage, childbearing, and securing a steady job. Numerous reasons have been suggested for this so-called prolonged transition into adulthood by young people including a lack of corresponding values and interests, labor market insecurity, educational inflation, prolonged periods spent seeking

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<sup>2</sup> Informants’ names are changed for the sake of anonymity.

jobs to match the higher education they attain, a general uncertainty regarding future prospects, less social pressure to marry or bear children at a young age, and a wider range of career options for women (Blossfeld, *et al.* 2005: 152-3). This study will not only explore informants' values, expectations and perceptions in relation to love and partnership, but also explore whether these views are looked upon differently in relation to major life changes experienced by informants over the course of the study such as uncoupling and becoming first-time parents.

## 4. “That’s real love.”

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*I knew I fell in love when I forgot everything else - the world, friends, time. You almost become crazy. There’s only the two of you, (Simone).*

In the following chapter, I give an overview of informants’ perceptions of initial stages of love and commitment bonding. I begin by presenting informants’ descriptions of new love and narratives of personal processes of relationship and identity formation. Meanwhile, I draw upon several social and psychological theories of love bonds with a particular emphasis on the ways in which informants’ perceptions on relationships cross boundaries between Giddens’ ideas of “romantic love,” “confluent love” and “pure relationship” (1992). Furthermore, I discuss informants’ perceptions of “real love” and romance within established committed relationship bonds, which most often manifest themselves in continued displays of mutual interest (communication), concern, care, commitment and ability to prioritize major life decisions based on one another, rather than flagrant gestures or fiery passions that might come to mind upon first mention of romantic love.

Informants describe love, in its initial stages, as something that simply happens to us - “*att man blir kär*” - that one *becomes* in love. One is overcome with emotion, at times to the detriment of work or studies. Love is seen as an external force, the external force, driving the formation of marriages and *samboskap* (cohabiting spousal relationships). Yet, this experience, however inconvenient it may be, is simultaneously considered highly desirable, if not necessary.

*“It happens when you least expect it. You suddenly can barely think of anyone or anything else. It overwhelms you and stresses you out, and sometimes you want it to disappear, but you want more of it at the same time. It is like a drug. I don’t think a person can be happy without some kind of love or romance in life,” (Maja).*

Informants often talk about the feeling of being with a new love partner by using the simple term “newly in love,” “*nykär*.” Informants use this word to describe an emotional state caused by meeting someone with whom they feel a strong, special connection rather quickly upon meeting or getting to know the person, and involving elements of physical and mental attraction. If the feeling is mutual and the relationship progresses in the “right direction,” it would eventually lead to a committed partnership with largely assumed rules governing monogamy. While some informants

speak of occasional, transient states of feeling trapped or bound within such a relationship, they also stress the importance of commitment to the relationship, even in hard times. While viewing romantic love as something that comes naturally in the beginning of a relationship, informants view this initial stage as something that inevitably ends, after which romance becomes more of an attitude or frame of mind with which partners must then actively work to remain in touch. These views are characteristic of Giddens' (1992) romantic love in which passionate love, or "amour passion," leads to a commitment that often lasts well after the "passion" is gone.

On the other hand, when informants present views related to confluent love and "pure relationship" ideals (namely autonomy, self-realization, and personal fulfillment) as *at odds* with "romantic love", it is often not in relation to a relationship at large but rather to a temporal, limited phase in which partners lost sight of their love, often resulting in partners' decisions to take a *paus/uppehåll* (break). These breaks would either help partners to realize that they were not "right" for each other and lead to uncoupling, or would instead lead to a realization of true love for one's partner, leading to a reinitiated coupling. Informants often associate such breaks with self-discovery rather than an aspiration or expectation for the future. In other words, the ultimate desire for informants is still forever love. For these reasons, I assert that informants' picture of romantic love takes a form in which elements of both romantic love and confluent love, as understood by Giddens (1992), is combined. To demonstrate this, I provide two excerpts from conversations with informants. In the first, Emilie describes how her relationship with her current *sambo* (cohabiting spouse) Emanuel began. The second, Tora describes a "break" she took from her *sambo* before they were married.

### **Emilie**

*"Emanuel and I met when we were assigned to a group project together in a class. We were both with other people at the time. I was living with a guy who I'd been with for five and a half years - since I was sixteen years old - so I wanted to see what else was out there. We started meeting for our group project a lot more than we needed to and we eventually broke up with our partners and pretty much moved in together. I had a separate place but we only spent about one night per week apart. For the first year we decided to have an open relationship - keep the sex separate from our love - mostly because it was what I wanted at the time since I had just gotten out of a long relationship - but he was also open to it. But the open relationship led to a lot of tension and jealousy. He found out about a guy I was sleeping with who lived in the same building. That was a stupid decision of mine, and I felt really bad about it. It became too much for him and he*



*broke up with me before the summer. I spent the summer with my family in my hometown and he in his. I was still seeing the guy from the building once in a while but realized how much I really loved Emanuel. I missed him so much. After the summer was over, he called. I told him I wanted to be with him again and after a while he said he could forgive me and try again. We've been monogamous for the past year and we are both very committed to each other."*

### **Tora**

*"We met 12 years ago at a socialist camp in Germany. I was 17 and Rikard was 22. I think I knew from the beginning that if I decided to go down that road, get married and have babies, he's the one I'd want to do it with. He was the one big love. But I was so young when we met, I told him I wanted to take a break. We were apart for about two years and during that time, I travelled, had lots of fun, had some shorter things with other guys. Rikard saw another girl on and off during that time. When I was ready and wanted to settle down more, Rikard was still seeing the other girl. But we soon got together again and as soon as we did, we felt more in love than ever. Deep down, we both always knew it was right."*

Emilie and Tora's narratives reveal a process of exploration leading to a form of commitment within their relationships. This correlates with the psychologically defined process of identity formation, transitioning from active identity exploration or diffusion (confusion) to identity achievement, and most often associated with a transition to adulthood (Erikson 1968, Marcia 1966, Marcia, *et al.* 1993). Identity formation entails a process of actively testing values, opinions, and experiences leading to identity-defining commitments. For informants, these commitments are associated with stability, continuity, self-esteem, security and comfort. While Emilie describes the process as leading to a realization of the extent of her love for Emanuel, Tora believes that she had always known that she and Rikard were meant for each other and that he was her "special person"; a belief Giddens (1992) strongly associates with romantic rather than confluent love. In other words, while Emilie and Tora each give love narratives which could be described as leading to a similar state of commitment to a monogamous love relationship through rather differing processes of identity exploration and formation, particularly in regard to the timing of a "realization" of their love for their partners.

For both Emilie and Tora, elements of "pure relationship," particularly a focus on self development and the individual autonomy, come into play in a more explicit way during temporary

phases they associate with adolescent exploration and being “young”. Emilie and Tora associate sexual passion with phases of exploration in addition to the initial phases of their current relationships, while reserving romantic love characteristics of destiny and true love for current partners alone. One informant explained the difference between sexual passion and romantic love this way: *“It [passionate love] is like when you first start a fire - it’s burning really wild but don’t know if it will last. If it does, it changes into being calm and steady. That kind of fire is the warmest and the most secure. That’s real love.”*

Other elements of confluent love, however, strongly carry over into informants’ romantic relationships, for instance the value of equality (discussed in Chapter 5.) and the need to maintain love through consistent maintenance and mutual disclosure (Giddens 1991b, 1992). The need for mutual disclosure corresponds with Gell’s theory of romantic love as intrinsically linked with informational exchange and the continual reciprocal exchange of intimate knowledge. A common theme in discussing relationships was the need for “openness” and “communication”. Informant Maja explains: *“The most important part of commitment is openness. You have to be able to discuss any problem and talk through things. Everything isn’t one hundred percent all the time. As long as it’s a phase, it’s ok. But if you can’t talk about it, you don’t really have a relationship.”*

Rather than perceiving romantic love as a precursor to confluent love, informants accept elements of both simultaneously. A primary example of this is the understanding of love as something which takes continual effort and mutual disclosure to maintain (confluent), held simultaneously with the belief that current partners are “the one” for them and that their bond to some extent simply “works” (romantic). Informants also connect elements of confluent love and pure relationship with a period of exploration before discovering the “real thing”. While informants’ views may certainly change in the future, at the period in which these women find themselves within committed and stable romantic relationships, they view their love relationships as something fragile enough that one must continually care for it or work to maintain it, but also, paradoxically, solid enough to be considered comfortably fixed, conclusive and sustainable.

One common thread between both the confluent and romantic love elements discussed is attachment. Since the 1980s, researchers in psychology have attempted to understand romantic love as an attachment process similar to the attachment formed between child and care-giver (Hazan & Shaver 1987, Brumbaugh & Fraley 2006). Brumbaugh and Fraley (2006) name several key factors of attachment relationships as “maintenance of proximity to one another, distress when the other is absent” and use of the partner as a “safe haven” and “secure base from which to explore the world”. Hazan and Saver (1987) claim that while attachment bonding is manifested differently and in different relationships among cultures across time and space, and while it can take time to establish

or achieve adult attachment bonds like romantic love, they are still a universal human norm. These theories share with Gell's theory (2011) the idea that the experience of romantic love is a combination of a universal emotional, inclination and socio-culturally specific relationship structures and experiences, although Gell focuses on romantic love as a knowledge system rather than a specific form of attachment bond.

Despite this similarity, these psychological attachment theories draw additional parallels between love of romantic partners and of children and care-givers, suggesting a relationship between romantic love and care. A discussion of love and care is almost entirely absent from Giddens' and Gell's theories of contemporary love. These psychological theories take up love as displayed in action, a connection which informants also draw. For example, while Maja finds open communication to be key to maintaining committed relationships, she associates this mutual disclosure primarily in relation to resolving conflicts within the relationship. She connects actions, on the other hand, with a more proactive and romantic display of intimacy: *"We find romance in little things - like when he makes us breakfast in the morning before I get up. He had a cosy little picnic with wine set up in our backyard last week - when he knew I was coming home from work really stressed. I love to do those kinds of things for him too - it makes me happy to see him smile. It shows that you really care."* According to Lynn Jamieson (1999), empirical research makes clear that for contemporary couples, "love and care as expressed by practical doing and giving is as much the crux of their relationship as a process of mutually discovering and enjoying each other."

Having presented informants' views on romantic love, I now introduce another way in which informants associate love and care, that is love as a factor in decision making. According to informants, love can be a major determinant of action. Sitting with Ida, a 27 year old woman from a small village in the Swedish county of Småland, on the balcony of her apartment she shares with her *sambo*, Mattias, she explains feeling slightly out of place in the city of Malmö: *"[...] I'm a family girl, and I sometimes become very homesick. - I miss the woods there and the calmer life."* Ida and Mattias had been together since their final year of *gymnasium* (secondary educational) studies. After graduating from a cantor-training program at a local *folkhögskola* (Sweden's closest equivalent to a community college), Ida moved to Malmö to be with her then *särbo* (non-cohabiting partner) Mattias, who had two years of studies left to complete.

*"I could have worked as a cantor right away in my hometown, but I moved - [I] studied some courses to keep me busy and looked for work. We had been long distance since he moved away to his [educational] program until I graduated. [...] I moved there because I loved him."*

Like Ida, Maja, 27, and her *sambo*, Karl-Johan, 24, have also based major life decisions on love:

*“We have moved to new cities four times over the past seven years. We moved for my education and for job opportunities for me and for him [Karl-Johan]. Every time, the other one followed. It hasn’t always been easy, both money-wise and making friends - but when you’re in love, you just make it work.”*

The privileged status informants assign to love places decisions favoring other factors at odds with love. In other words, if love is real, then practical or logistical obstacles must be overcome. If obstacles are not overcome, then the reason often given by informants is a lack of love. Informants’ perspectives on their own decision making and that of their partners, and the lengths they are willing to go to ensure closeness, are at odds with Thomas Johansson’s claim that Swedish couples’ pure relationship tendencies have led to living together purely for rational reasons (Arpi 2010). Rather, it is more in keeping with Eva Bernhardt’s and Turbid Noack’s (2010) study of cohabiting couples in Sweden and Norway aged 25 to 35 and their factors for making another major life decision: marriage. Bernhardt and Noack found that while socioeconomic factors played a part, so did commitment and love, especially amongst young women (ibid). Further research is needed before one could discuss in detail the implications of gender differences in contemporary commitments to romantic love sentiments in Sweden, particularly with regard to care and decision-making, however I take up the topic to some degree in Chapter 7. For now, it suffices to say that from the perspectives of informants, romantic love matters.

## 5. Love and the “Rational Swede”

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In the previous chapter, I discuss informants’ perceptions of romantic love within their own relationships and introduce how informants conceive of romantic love as evident in the “little things” but also as a motivator for continual actions of care and major life decision such as moving to a new city. In this chapter, I relate romantic love to the characteristically “Swedish” valuation of rationality. As informant Jenny describes, *“People might not think of Sweden as the most romantic place in the world, but that doesn’t mean we don’t want romance. I think most of us really do.”*

Social research strongly associates Scandinavia, and Sweden specifically, with the value of rationality. Ethnographic literature has long discussed the behavior of Swedes in relation to their perceived “rationalist mentality” and the importance they place on rational thinking and emotional suppression (Daun 1989, Åkerblom & Holmberg 2008). Research presenting cultures in relation to scale from emotionality to rationality run the risk of painting highly simplistic and prejudiced portrayals. Ethnologist Åke Daun (1989), for instance, contrasts the Swedish value of rationality to French, German, and British, describing it as driven more by a search for moderation (*lagom*) than for pragmatics or logic. But how do Swedish conceptualizations of rationality come into play in love relationships?

A central aspect in the discussion of rationality is its assumed connection to the modern relationship and the corresponding notion that contemporary humans are beginning to take a new “rational approach” to relationship structure (Arpi 2010). Giddens goes as far as to predict that the romantic love ideal will be completely replaced with casual sexual exchanges characterized by increasing pleasure, democracy and agency and decreasing commitment (Giddens 1991a, 1991b, 1992). Social psychologist Thomas Johansson paints the “rational” Swedes as far along in their movement toward “pure relationship” claiming that relationship structure in Sweden today, particularly among the middle class, is based on rationality and financial purposes as opposed to traditions or romantic love (Arpi 2010). Johansson supports his argument by referencing the dramatic rise in divorce rates in the 60s and 70s in Sweden in addition to the rise in nontraditional family unions (Arpi 2010). Bauman too connects a lack of commitment to increased rationality in modern times through his concept of “liquid modern rationality”:

*“Don’t let yourself be caught. Avoid embraces that are too tight. Remember, the deeper and denser your attachments, commitments, engagement, the greater your risk. [...] And*

*remember, of course, that keeping all eggs in one basket is the ultimate folly!*,” (Bauman 2003: 58-59).

In some ways, Sweden fits the expected characteristics of Giddens’ “pure relationship” model. Sweden has indeed already gained a global reputation as a forerunner in modern demographic development and “individualized”, “nontraditional” family unions. Trends in alternative forms of familial unions in addition to heterosexual cohabitation have also become more prominent within Swedish society. Examples include *särboende* (living apart while maintaining a relationship), *halvsamboende* (“half living together” e.g. during weekends and holidays), homosexual partnerships, single parent homes (increasingly common as rates of separation as well as fertility options for single parents increase), and communal living arrangements (Bergnéhr 2007, Tomasson 1998). The conception of Sweden’s unique defamilization is considered a result of not only increasing individualistic and rationalistic values, but also strong national welfare policies directed towards unburdening households and decreasing kinship dependence (Esping-Andersen 1999:51, Melby, *et al.* 2008: 30-31). External services for the care of children and elderly, family allowances, and subsidized education through the collegiate level are some examples of this.

However, Johansson (Arpi 2010, Johansson 2000) does not highlight several other important factors about Sweden today that complicate the picture. For instance, Sweden’s divorce rates have remained relatively static since their rise in the 60s and 70s, even decreasing during much of the 1980s through the early 2000s, and Swedish marriages today last an average of 25 years (Statistiska centralbyrån 2013). Furthermore, marriage rates have actually risen from 1998 to the present, leading more recent studies to suggest the possibility of an unexpected marriage trend reversal in Sweden (Bergnéhr 2007, Bernhardt & Goldschneider 2007, Ohlsson 2009). These statistics also do not take into account the number of Swedish couples (both heterosexual and homosexual) currently living together in committed relationships albeit outside of institutionalized marriage. In other words, there is no empirical evidence suggesting an imminent demise of committed partnerships or the institution of marriage in Sweden (*ibid*). This not only calls into question the pervasiveness of pure relationship ideologies in Sweden, but also what might actually constitute a “rational” in a contemporary Swedish partnership.

Results from a recent study of the attitudes and values of Swedes also complicates the “pure relationship” picture and questions the assumption that Swedes place more weight on rationality and pragmatics such as economic gain than emotional, committed bonds. In 2013, the national Swedish Youth Board conducted a comprehensive, quantitative survey on the values of Swedes today. The results of this survey reveal that, “living in a good relationship” is more

important for Swedish young people (ages 16-29) than the arguably more “rational” choices of economic security or a permanent job, reaching a good level within a profession, building a home/having children, creating a good future for their children, or having a good place in society (Swedish Youth Board: 2013). Living in a good relationship was also more consistently ranked as important throughout all age brackets (between 16 and 74 years of age) than any other category, apart from having and enjoying leisure time (ibid). Moreover, young people were found to be more content in their relationships to their partner/husband/wife/cohabiting spouse (*sambo*) than with their current leisure time, health, accommodation, education, job, economy, their lives in general and Swedish society in general (ibid). This research suggests that young Swedes not only value and seek out committed love relationships, but that they associate them with less disillusionment, stress and uncertainty than they do with regard to many other aspects of their lives. Could it be, then, that Swedes view committed love partnerships to be more “rational” even in Sweden today than the fluid bonds and casual exchanges described by Giddens (1992) and Bauman (2003)?

From the perspectives of my informants, the answer is yes. In contrast to settled committed love partnerships that just feel “right”, informants associate periods in their own lives in which they engaged in casual sexual exchanges driven by lust to be more irrational: “*That was a crazy time, I was still figuring out what I actually wanted*” says Emilie. Both Emilie and Tora took breaks from their committed love relationships to experience more casual, open relations driven by sexual attraction, relations that better reflect the direction many researchers believe “modern rational” relationships are heading. In line with the depiction of modern “individualized” partnerships, they felt a need at the time to seek personal fulfillment and development through identity exploration and negotiation, however, today they associate these casual relations with neither rationality nor romantic love, but rather a sense of youthful naïveté and temporary blindness to the love for their partner. They associate committed bonds with both rationality and romantic love. While having strongly distanced themselves from several traditional ideas regarding committed relationships in favor of individualistic values, (for instance that couples in love should marry, that marriage should precede childbearing, and that heterosexual couples make better parents than homosexual couples), they maintain romantic desire to connect with a single, special person and share a monogamous life with them and do not consider this desire to be inherently traditional, irrational or un-modern.

Swedish author, debater and social anthropologist Petra Östergren’s (2006) analysis of pornography and prostitution policy questions the extent to which Swedish equality policy makers and feminist leaders continue to perpetuate and rationalize sexual morals connected to love and committed partnership demands with little or no reflection. Östergren (ibid) discusses the romantic

associations and expectations of women attached to such love and sexual ideologies and the problematic control over women's behavior associated with Swedish equality policy formation over the past 30 years in the name of equality and love.

Could it be in increasingly individualistic partnerships, that the desire for committed love remains, perhaps growing even stronger? Contributions to the topic by social psychology and psychological anthropology suggest that adult attachment bonds and a longing for escape and transcendence to be universal human norms (Hazan and Saver 1987, Lindholm 2007). As Gell (2011) has argued, personal emotions (often inconsistent and erratic) replace societal pressures as the primary adhesive bonding partnerships, romantic love may hold an increasingly essential role. In the highly secularized context of contemporary Sweden in which a level of rationality is valued and emotional suppression is expected, romantic love could be conceived as a last acceptable frontier for escape, indulgence and transcendence in a contemporary imaginary.

In the previous chapter, I discussed the role that love plays in informants' decisions to move fairly long distances to new cities in Sweden. Informants had relatively little concern for the ability to make basic ends meet economically and so they and their partners felt willing and able to take a risk and base a major decision on love. According to informants, this sense of basic security among Swedish middle class young people in making such decisions is made at least in part possible by the strength of the Swedish welfare state. The major goal of social democracy, the historical hallmark of Sweden's political realm, has been to liberate the individual by freeing them of civil and familial responsibilities and the bonds of socio-economic background through welfare state policy (Andersson, L. 2006). Several informants referred to the ability to take either (tuition free) educational courses, receive corresponding financial aid to cover basic living expenses, or seek job support as a way to cushion the transition to life in a new city and allow them to "follow their hearts". Under this light, the context of Sweden actually supports love-based decision making through its strong welfare state and social democratic values, allowing Swedish youth more freedom to follow their heart through partial liberation from basic economic concerns.

However, Swedish young people's valuation of love and willingness to base decisions on love likely relates as much to economic stability related to Sweden's subsidized education and social welfare net as it does to economic instability related to the influence of youth unemployment and global economic trends. By this, I mean that while nationally subsidized higher education and employment support contribute to Swedish youth's opinion that moving to a new city for love is no major threat to their basic economic survival, Swedish youth also often lack a stable connection to the Swedish labour market providing even less of a "rational" reason *not* to move for love. In 2012, Sweden ranked as the country with the highest ratio of youth unemployment verses general



unemployment in the OECD, a situation which UNRIC (United Nations Regional Information Center for Western Europe) links with several factors including educations attracting more graduates than job openings within the labour market (i.e. tourism and media), disagreements over how to counteract unemployment<sup>3</sup>, and a lack of opportunities to gain entry-level experience within the labour market, particularly within service sectors (UNRIC 2012). Studies show that while Sweden's expansive employment policies, benefits, and unionization create a greater security for the gainfully employed in Sweden, they do little to shield educated youth in Sweden from prolonged instability in transition to coveted stable positions within their fields (Blossfeld, *et al.* 2005:135-6). However, the issue of youth unemployment certainly expands beyond Sweden. Bauman connects global economic downturn to a youthful generation of well-educated "outcasts" within Europe with "prospects of long-term unemployment and long stretches of 'rubbish jobs' well below their skills and expectations" (Bauman 2012). It is against this backdrop of increasing job insecurity amongst youth that committed romantic love could be seen as providing an increasing sense of stability, continuity and (individualized) care lacking otherwise in the lives of Swedish twenty-somethings. Committed romantic love could therefore be seen as a "rational" (yet historically highly gendered and unequal) form of modern "communism within capitalism" (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995). I end with the words of informant Maja who attributes the love and care between herself and her *sambo* Karl-Johan for helping them both through a long period of temporary jobs and economic insecurity:

*"We have finally started to settle down, and that feels really nice. First we lived in Karlskrona and then we moved to Malmö because I was offered a temporary position. Then he [Karl-Johan] was offered a job in Göteborg at the same bar chain where he worked at part-time in Malmö, so we moved there. It was hard for me to find a job there, so I studied one more year at the university instead. Then I was offered a temporary job in Helsingborg, so we moved back to Skåne. Karl-Johan found work in Lund and now he's trying to open his own bar in Copenhagen. Just this year, my job in Helsingborg became permanent. It took me eight years to find a job that lasted for more than six months in my field. But during that time, we were always there for each other. We have kept each other positive and helped each other through it."*

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<sup>3</sup> The Employer's Union calls for lower minimum wages and greater flexibility while the trade unions call for more subsidies for the creation of youth jobs.

## 5.1 When Things Don't Go as Planned

*Tog tåget ner, du skulle dumpa mig  
Bättre på plats än genom telefon  
Jag visste inte vad som väntade  
Första semestern på fyra år*

*Som jag förstod var vi förälskade  
Du sa att ingen vart så bra som jag  
Vi talade om allt och älskade  
Jag låna pengar och kom till din stad*

*Varför ska man tänka på någon annan än sig själv?  
Ego...<sup>4</sup>*

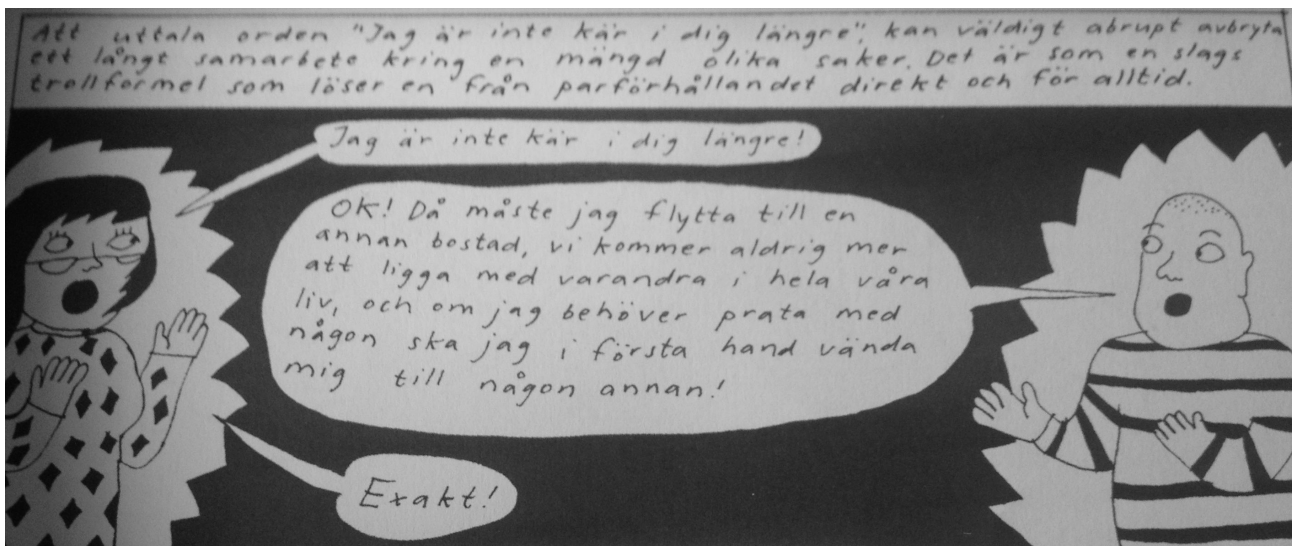
Regardless of the desire for and often contentedness with committed, love relationships, many Swedish partnerships, especially among young people, end. While I have argued for the prolonged strength of the ideals of committed love and “special” person amongst today’s Swedish youth, I have also illustrated the influence that individualistic ideals such as self-development and a need to maintain love have had on informants’ love relationships. To repeat the words of informant Maja: *“Everything isn’t one hundred percent all the time. As long as it’s a phase, it’s fine.”* But what happens when it is not just a phase?

In the two years during which my research took place, two of my six key informants, Ida and Jenny, saw their relationships with their partners end. This period marked major transitions for each of these women. I will discuss the reasons behind Jenny’s decision to end her relationship in Chapter 7. Ida, on the other hand, was not expecting her relationship to end: *“He’s in love with someone else now- I’m not even sure how they met, I didn’t want to know. [...] It doesn’t feel right that he can walk away from everything we built. It just doesn’t seem fair.”* Ida had been in a committed relationship with her partner for nine years, since she was 18 years old. *“I always felt secure in our relationship. I always knew he would be the one I would marry and have kids with.*

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<sup>4</sup> Lyrics from “Dumpa mig” by Swedish pop singer Veronica Maggio. English Translation: “Took the train down, you’d be dumping me, Better in person than by phone, I didn’t know what was in store, First vacation in four years, As I understood it we were in love, You said nothing was as good as my, We talked about everything and loved, I loaned money and came to your city, why should one think of anyone but themselves? Ego...”

*We and everyone we knew just assumed it.” Certain her relationship would last, it was only after her relationship had ended that Ida reflects upon her relationship in terms of irrationality or inequality. “Maybe it was just dumb of me to be so sure that it would last. To me, the whole thing [the break up] came out of nowhere. Now all of Malmö reminds me of him. I feel like I need to either move or try to find a way to make this city my own”.*



**Figure 2.** Swedish comic writer and radio host Liv Strömquist (2010) captures the arbitrary and irrational nature of a modern relationship.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps then, a highly simplified summation is that for Ida committed love was rational, but only insofar as it lasted. According to Gell (2011), for a contemporary, middle-class European living with access to a broader, more globalized “knowledge universe,” the “essentially arbitrary choice” of entering a love relationship is “rationalized as fixed in advance by the wiles of the love-god, whose intervention relieves us of the burden of responsibility for our actions, which, in fact, is necessary for us to act at all.” Yet, at the same time, “love is supposed to be irrational and disinterested, the unsearchable causal principle which unites loving couples and divides them from everybody else,” (Gell 2011). Looking at the end of a love relationship along a similar line as Gell envisions its beginning reveals a new danger specific to the externalization of the love force in an increasingly individualized world, an ironic, contemporary rationalization of the irrational captured in Strömquist’s strip (2010). The ability to effectively rationalize the end of a relationship by no

<sup>5</sup> English translation: “To utter the words ‘I’m not in love with you anymore’ can very abruptly end a long collaboration concerning many different things. It is like a magic formula that liberates one from the partnership immediately and forever. -I am not in love with you anymore! -Ok! Then I have to move out, we are never going to sleep together again for the rest of our lives, and if I need to talk to someone I must at first hand turn to someone else! -Exactly!”

longer being “in love” with one’s partner once again can therefore arguably be seen as a contemporary coping strategy enabling that fickle, so-called “love-god” to take a brunt of the responsibility, relieving the self of burden.

## 5.2 Rationality : Romantic Love : Gender Norms

Having presented and explored some of the inconsistent lines of thought regarding contemporary love relationships and rationality in the context of Sweden, I end with a discussion of “rationality” and “romantic love” as gendered terms in Sweden and the potential implications of this. Anna Bredström explores how Swedes themselves reflect upon their collective identity in relation to romantic love and rationality in her anthropological analysis of “racialized sexism” found in the educational material of the nationally subsidized immigrant course “Svenska för invandrare” (Swedish for immigrants), which seeks to introduce new immigrants to Swedish language and culture (Bredström 2005: 528-9). Although Bredström mainly discusses the negative connotations of the “emotional immigrant man”/“rational Swedish man” dichotomy reinforced within the educational material, she also notes that “emotionality” is presented as a positive attribute of the “non-Swedish man” when the material approaches one particular topic; love. “Immigrant men are looked upon as more romantic than the emotionally inhibited Swedes” (Bredström 2005: 529). Bredström posits that the educational material actively attempts to ease the stereotype of Swedish men as “stiff and boring” and of Swedish society as “consisting of lonesome people with plastic relations- incapable of communicating love,” by emphasizing that Swedes still “marry out of love,” maintain long-lasting relationships, and consider divorce a failure (ibid). The material, according to Bredström, aims to portray Swedish society as modern but “not too modern” to have completely let go of traditional romantic sentiment (ibid). Bredström’s case study not only provides a perspective on how collective Swedish identity is negotiated as a compromise between a rationality and romantic love duality, but also of rationality as a masculine construction and romantic love as a feminine construction in Sweden.

Informant Emilie rejects what she believes to be showy, gendered or chauvinistic displays of romance, “*Over-the-top romance can be seen as a bit silly here, sometimes even sexist, and many couples reject things like Alla hjärtans dag [Valentine’s Day] for being too commercial. Also, shouldn’t couples show their love to each other everyday, so why reserve one day for that?*” However, Emilie also believes that for every Swedish couple like hers there is at least another amongst her generation with quite different views on romance, “[...] *I heard a group of women my*

*age on the train talking about how Swedish men are not romantic enough. I know a lot of women here really want that too, guys buying them flowers and everything, like they see in movies. I think its about knowing what the other person likes and cares about. Couples show love many different ways.”*

According to Lutz (1986), normative assumptions connecting rationality to males and emotionality to domesticity and females were long unquestioned in research on the relationship between culture, society and emotional development. Studies comparing early Western philosophical discourse on rationality with modern discourse on management, work, and organization reveal how deeply embedded traditional assumptions of rationality as inherently masculine continue to shape organizational discourse today (Ross-Smith & Kornberger 2004). On the other hand, romantic love in the context of contemporary popular culture is often constructed as “feminine”, for example through global trends in targeting marketing towards women and girls for literature, film and television within which romantic love is a central motif (Lindholm 2007). New research suggests that Swedish women are more inclined to base their decision to marry on love than economics in comparison to men, and that women are faster to commit to a stable identity with regard to love relationships than men (Frisèn & Wängvist 2014, Bernhardt, Wiik, Noack 2010). However, Frisèn and Wängvist (2014) suggest that young women’s hastier identity achievements concerning committed love partnerships may reflect a rational planning strategy rather than greater romantic inclination based on the idea that women in Sweden still feel more pressure than men to balance multiple roles in society as parent and dual wage earner and thus feel the need to make identity commitments more quickly.

Despite any tendency today to associate a preoccupation with romantic love with women, Lindholm (2007) suggests women to have been the less romantic gender throughout the majority of Western history: “Because [women's] social status traditionally derived from marriage, they had to try to balance irrational romantic attraction with hardheaded pragmatism” (ibid). As mentioned earlier, in contrast to the dreary love forecasts of Giddens, Johansson, and the like, who suggest the increased value of outside work and decrease in family (for both women and men) may cause love relationships to be replaced by frequent, casual, pleasure exchanges, Lindholm proposes that all people, but women in particular, may actually become more drawn to romantic love over time (2007). Lindholm asserts that as women become more economically independent, they may feel less concerned with the pragmatics of securing a “suitable” partner and join men in feeling freer to seek the emotional transcendence of idealized love (Lindholm 2007: 359). In contrast to the justifiably strong links historians and social scientists continually draw between romantic love and the subjugation of women, Lindholm's prediction presents a more active contemporary Western

woman, one whose desire for romantic love can be made to signify independence from rational thinking as easily as it can be associated with lingering cultural relics of patriarchal dominance.

When placed together with the idea that Swedish culture is becoming less romantic and more rational, that “Swedish couples do not live together for traditional or romantic reasons,” but for “purely rational reasons” (Arpi 2010), the dualistic construction of romantic love as feminine and rationality as masculine replicates an essentialistic construction of Sweden’s modernization as increasingly defamilized, pragmatic, and masculine. Furthermore, considering the importance love serves for informants’ in their own relationships and decision-making processes, presenting Sweden today as especially rational, modern, and lacking in romantic sentiments may be downplaying and discounting of the functions and impact romantic love sentiments hold in a contemporary Swedish context for love partnerships consisting of persons of any gender, sex, or sexual orientation both inside and outside of institutional marriage. Informants perceive their own romantic gestures between themselves and their partners as individualistic and largely non-gendered, unique to their personal relationship and dictated by who the other person is rather than gender. “*We might be even more romantic than other generations,*” says Jenny, “*because we get to decide what romance means.*”

### **5.3 Modern, but not “too modern”?**

I have discussed how informants in committed love relationships view their relationships as both more rational and more romantic than casual sexual exchanges, likening them to supportive safe havens during a transitional phase entering into adulthood. I will discuss emerging adulthood further in relation to love relationships in more detail in the following chapter. However, particularly within the context of increasing individualization, these safe havens and committed agreements are subject to dissolve, and while researchers often associate this with increasing equality as either partner can initiate a relationship’s end, the desire for dissolution can be extremely sudden and uneven and could in fact feel more unfair to an individual in the absence of formalities such as a legal marriage contract: “*It felt no different than a marriage, so it was quite shocking how easy it was for him to walk away*” (Ida). The sudden dissolution of Ida’s long-term relationship evokes a paradoxical question of whether any seemingly “modern” form of personal relationship can be considered democratic or rational if it can be dissolved by one individual arbitrarily at any time without a seemingly just or rational reason, unless, that is, one considers the subjective feeling of being “in love” to be both just and rational.

The idea that individualization and global women's movements have transformed modern relationship structure into rational or equal agreements is exciting and socially relevant, but it is also strongly essentialistic and ignores the prevalence and implications of contemporary romantic love sentiments. The relatively stagnant divorce rates, quarter-century-long marriages, and increase in marriages over the past half a century suggest a social space in Sweden in which paradoxical social ideals of rationalism, commitment and romantic love are conjoined in what Bredström might call a "modern, but not too modern" approach to love relationships. By taking a closer look at contemporary Swedish romantic love narratives, we may expand our understanding of romantic love beyond a precursor to a rational relationship structure in Sweden to conceive of its importance in contemporary Swedish relationship structure.

## 6. Love and Emerging Adulthood

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*[...] I'm nearly thirty but still I don't feel like a proper adult, (Informant).*

“Emerging adulthood” is an increasingly popular concept used to explain shifts in the process of identity formation in young people today. It is well noted that Swedish youth increasingly delay many markers of transition to adulthood in both the public and private spheres including marriage, childbearing, employment, and property ownership (Blossfeld, *et al.* 2005). This delay is common among countries across the West and beyond and has prompted theorists to articulate an entirely new modern life stage generally experienced from the age of 18 and the late 20s. Psychologist Jeffery Jensen Arnett refers to the stage as “emerging adulthood” while author and social theorist Kay Hymowitz extends the age range from about 21 to 35 years and prefers the term “pre-adulthood” (Fridkis 2011, Henig 2010).

Focusing on transition into adulthood within the private sphere, I asked informants what they understand to be the reasons Swedes marry and have children later today than in the past in addition to their personal reasons for abstaining or delaying marriage and children. I was curious as to whether informants associate their own delays with a general lack of interest in marriage and children, a conscious desire to delay or abstain, or a necessary reality due to larger, societal changes. Furthermore, I wished to explore how values of love and commitment affect and are affected by the delays of these private sector markers of adulthood.

Before discussing specific responses, I will provide a bit of context regarding informants' general perspectives on marriage and childbearing, as Scandinavia, and particularly Sweden are generally considered global outliers in this regard. Informants see no difference between cohabiting unmarried couples and married couples in Sweden. In keeping with this lack of distinction, they do not expect to face any stigma if they choose not to marry or to have children outside of wedlock. In fact, around two-thirds of Swedish children are born to unmarried parents (Bernhardt 2001). That being said, informants will likely choose to marry at some point in the future. Their expectation to marry consists of a combination of romantic sentiment (desire to celebrate their love relationships) and pragmatic sentiment (establishing legal inheritance ties between partners). They see marriage as a positive, romantic display of commitment to a relationship, however the timing of marriage is often seen as a pragmatic concern. All informants also desire and expect to have children in the future, yet often found it difficult to articulate why,



instead seeing the building of a family as a rather obvious, natural step: *“I have a couple friends who don’t want children, but not many. I’ve always assumed I would have a family and never really thought about why. I think it’s natural to want to experience having a family of your own.”*

## **6.1 Why the Wait?**

Regarding informants’ reasons for delaying marriage and children, responses take up a number of personal and societal factors. I will begin with Maja who discusses her desire to delay in relation to her partner Karl-Johan’s desires and her parents’ divorce. Maja and her husband have not seen eye to eye on these issues in the past. *“[...] Karl-Johan has always wanted to get married, I’ve never really gotten why. He would get married today. I’ve never cared about it, but I love him and I’m happy to do it. The same went for children, except that recently I’ve changed my mind and now I really want kids too.”* Regarding her reasons for her own hesitance in marriage, she explains, *“My parents married too young and then divorced. Many more people today have divorced parents. It was very hard on my parents and left a big impression on me. When I get married, I will be right the first time.”*

Maja attributes her delay of marriage and childbearing to her own desire to avoid the emotional cost of divorce that she associates with her parents. Maja does not object to the values of commitment, but believes delaying marriage and children will help to ensure stability for her future family. Unlike the common assumption among modern theorists that delays in marriage and childbearing reflect new trends to favor casual over committed relationships and to focus on self rather than family, Maja provides an example of values of committed love and family actually supporting a desire to delay in marriage and childbearing. The romantic love ideal of “forever love” is seen in Maja’s desire to “get it right the first time,” yet her delay of marriage and children reflect modern themes of rationality and questioning associated with “confluent love” (Giddens 1992). This particular case sooner suggests the retraditionalization rather than detraditionalization of committed love and familial values, and the strategy of delaying marriage to avoid divorce may actually function as a modern strategy in avoiding divorce as evidenced by new research linking an increase in women’s age at marriage to lower rates of divorce and greater relationship satisfaction (Rotz 2011). Although the research examines the US specifically, many countries including Sweden have exhibited similar trends of decreasing divorce rates between the 1980s and 2000s coinciding with increases in women’s age at first marriage (ibid). Likewise, Bernhardt argues that the simultaneous delay of and desire for marriage by young Swedes is not a sign that marriage is

becoming “un-modern” in Sweden, but just the opposite (Bernhardt 2001).

On the other hand, informant Emilie associates her decision to delay marriage and children with the opportunity to explore and develop herself prior to settling down:

*“Traditional marriage was more important then [in the past]. Now, women usually don’t get married until they’re already settled with a child, which I think is great. Between 20 and 30 years old - that’s a time to travel and learn to be independent. Plus that personal goals are different now. My goal has been to get a good education, learn about the world, experience new things, and figure out what makes me happy. Then I’ll probably settle down.”*

Emilie views the delayed transition to adulthood as positive, progressive, and important to her individual process of identity formation. She sees traveling and living on her own as steps towards adulthood, as they build independence and facilitate self-discovery. Emilie associates traditional milestones such as marriage and children with a future stage in life which she will enter when she feels personally ready to “settle down”, stressing ideals of personal agency, self-fulfillment, and personal growth. Unlike Maja, the reasons Emilie give for delaying marriage and childbearing are in line with the modern, individualistic relationship narrative.

Other informants view the delay as the result of external hindrances and the insecurity of a life in flux rather than an individual choice:

*“We’d like to start a family, but it’s only now that we’re starting to feel settled. Babies and a wedding require focus and we have had to focus on other things like our studies and extra jobs. I switched educations to help me find a good job, but it was still hard. Turns out there are a lot more of us than there are jobs for us.”*

*“It’s harder to become an adult now. I’m nearly thirty and I still don’t feel like a proper adult. When I was young, I just assumed that by this age, I’d have a house and kids. It’s hard for us to even find an apartment contract lasting more than six months. You need a permanent job to get a mortgage, and in many fields, those jobs just aren’t available to us. Before having kids, we need to feel stability.”*

Aware of the discourse surrounding emerging adulthood, these informants discuss their experiences with delayed markers of adulthood in the private sphere in relation to larger societal

trends. They are frustrated and disillusioned by the difficulty they themselves and their friends have experienced with finding “good” jobs which they understand to be both steady and connected to their educational background. They also compare the pace of their transition to adulthood to that of their parents’ generation, whom they believe had a quicker and more defined transition. These informants echo global challenges facing educated young people across the world (Blossfeld, *et al.* 2005). Researchers link delayed transition to adulthood to global trends of labor market insecurity, educational inflation, prolonged periods spent seeking jobs to match the higher education attained, and a general uncertainty regarding future prospects (*ibid.*). According to Bauman, young people meet the prospect of downward mobility across Europe today, an unanticipated struggle considering many of these youth had trusted the assurance of parents and mentors that higher education would lead to a good job (Bauman 2012). A report by the Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies highlights the contrast between earlier predictions that Generation Y (a generational term referring to young people born between the ages of 1980 and 1994) would be the generation to “get it all” and today’s sobering description of the “Generation Lost or the Outcast Generation” (2012).

In recent years in Sweden, media outlets have brought the subject of Generation Y’s delayed adulthood to the wider mainstream. A prime example of this is Swedish newspaper Svenska Dagbladet’s 2012 article series “Vuxenliv på vänt” (*Adult life on hold*) which chronicles the experiences of Generation Y’ers and their efforts to enter adulthood in Sweden. The series struck a chord with many young Swedes leading Svenska Dagbladet to add a number of reader testimonials to the series. Described as unprecedentedly well-educated, digitally competent, and globally minded, members of Generation Y strive towards upward social mobility in the aftermath of a global economic crisis and increasing lack of stability in the Swedish housing and labor markets (Carling 2012). In these testaments, Swedish young people describe personal feelings of low self-esteem, stress, depression, and anger attributed to their inability to “become adults” (Svenska Dagbladet 2012).

The variety of reasons given by just five informants for delaying marriage and childbearing exemplifies the complexity of the ways in which emerging adulthood can be perceived by those experiencing it, even amongst relatively homogeneous groups. The responses also reveal interdependencies between emotions, relationships, and economic trends in relation to future planning. Arnett and Tanner suggest while connected to global trends, the experience of emerging adulthood varies greatly depending upon factors such as culture, educational attainment, and social class and therefore emphasize the need for further investigation and description of this variation (Arnett, *et al.* 2011). The responses given by informants, all middle class Swedish women in their

mid to late twenties within cohabiting relationships, display a variety of levels of perceived influence from personal choice, to negotiations between partners and opposition against the decisions of parents, to societally and globally imposed hindrances.

## **6.2 “You can have it all, if you are realistic.”**

While informants’ reasons for delays in marriage and childbearing vary considerably, they share a view of “settling down” as a positive and desirable aspiration and do not associate their delayed marriage and childbearing to a lack of interest in love or commitment. On the contrary, they see love as a desirable if not essential counter-balance to (and escape from) frustrations of their current life stage. Additionally, they consider a well-functioning committed partnership to be an important, mutual source of comfort, security, and emotional support. Seeing cohabitation and marriage as more or less one and the same, informants understand their decision to cohabit as a distinct step toward adulthood in and of itself.

With regard to expectations of work, relationship, and parenthood priorities in the future, informants express a hope and determination to balance all three equally rather than prioritize one over another. Jenny says, *“I really hope it’s possible to balance it all. I think it is, but you have to be careful. If anything is not prioritized it is probably the love and the relationship, but that’s also the most important thing. If you and your partner are not happy together, everything else suffers.”* According to informants, striking the “right balance” is a strongly desirable goal, *“You can have it all if you are realistic. Most women have this image that they need the perfect job, relationship, and family life. Perfect is not possible, but finding a good balance is definitely possible. We’re lucky that it’s possible now that fathers play a bigger role at home”* (Ida).

Informants talk about a balance between relationship, family, and work as a goal that is difficult but possible to achieve. However, Ida describes pressure specifically experienced by women to live up to an unattainable image of perfection regarding work, relationship, and family. Gender differences in visions of work/family dynamics in the future may serve to reproduce gender inequalities in Swedish family life. This has been explored to some extent already among childless emerging adults in Sweden where it’s been suggested that emerging adult women are both more likely to see parenthood as a given social norm and more likely to want a balance between work and family priorities in the future than childless emerging adult men who were more likely to want to prioritize either family or work over the other (Carlsson, *et al.* 2014).

### 6.3 Emerging adulthood(s)?

The concept of emerging adulthood serves as a useful descriptive tool in discussing delays in marriage and childbirth among young people in Sweden and across the world. That being said, many factors including educational background, social class, economics, and socio-political context could affect one's experience of emerging adulthood and the choice to delay marriage and childbearing. There is certainly no single answer as to why my informants delay marriage or childbearing. Their variation in responses reveals significant difference in the extent to which informants perceive the stage to be a personal choice versus a societal symptom. As analysis and predictions regarding Generation Y in relation to delays in adulthood gain popularity in media outlets across the world, there is a tendency to universalize emerging adulthood as a single experience. While global trends are a factor, it is important that research explores variation in experiences of and outlook on emerging adulthood as descriptions even amongst my informants range from a demonstration of freedom to a form of entrapment.

Informants do not consider delay of marriage and childbirth to reflect a lack of love or commitment. In fact, Maja views marriage delay as an effort to secure a more stable marriage. Informants connect delays in both marriage and childbearing with both positive changes in social norms promoting independence and self-development (particularly for women) in addition to negative changes such as increasing difficulty for younger Swedes to enter the labour and housing markets. Informants view higher education as a double-edged sword, positive in that it provides opportunities for personal development and the promise of a better job, but negative in that informants connect the experience of being a student to economic instability and pressures to both complete studies and align acquired skills with a "good" job before confidently identifying as a "proper adult". Economic insecurity and difficulty in securing a stable job provide examples of pragmatic reasons that informants delay marriage despite desires connected to commitment and romance. These findings are in line with Bernhardt's research on young adult Swedes and their attitudes on marriage (2001). Recent studies of marriage values amongst Swedes present opposing views as to whether pragmatic concerns such as economics or romantic sentiments factor more strongly in the decision to marry (Bernhardt 2001, Arpi 2010). My discussions with informants suggest that one reason for this may be that researchers fail to distinguish between informants' answers in relation to marriage in general and choice of marriage partner versus the decision to marry at a particular point in time. Furthermore, informants desire a balanced, triple role as parent, romantic partner and worker but also reflect upon pressure for women to be "perfect" at all three.

They believe romantic love may be difficult to maintain with the combined pressures of children and a job, however they find it important to maintain nonetheless. In Sweden, the expectation to balance or juggle multiple roles rather than prioritize or focus on a single role has been particularly found amongst women (Carlsson, *et al.* 2014). This, along with research suggesting that emerging adult women in Sweden work through identity exploration and reach identity formation significantly earlier than emerging adult men with regard to love relationships (Frisèn & Wängvist 2010), suggest that women in Sweden in general may experience the process of emerging adulthood differently than men, and that this may be the result of differing attitudes and values projected onto adulthood and the future self. In the following chapter, I delve deeper into informants' views on equality and gender difference in relation to their love relationships.

## 7. Love and the “Equal” Swede

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*For me, love is equal. That's the only way it could ever be romantic, (Simone).*

Throughout history and even today, love is described in a great variety of ways: as a desire, a need, a situation, an attachment, or a deeply rooted friendship. Love is also associated with a variety of paradoxical characteristics including erotic passion, compassion, blindness, enlightenment, power, dependence, selflessness, rebellion, and perhaps most contentiously in the context of contemporary Sweden; *equality*. “*For me, love is equal. That's the only way it could ever be romantic.*” That very statement by an informant opens the door to a multitude of questions. The precise language that she uses, the insistence that that which is unequal is simply not romantic and not love, characterizes a new understanding of both love and romance.

I have previously discussed a situation in which young women view love in a variety of seemingly paradoxical ways if one subscribes to the disparities between romantic and confluent love and the linear progression toward pure relationship suggested by Giddens (1992). I have also described the different ways in which these women view their partnerships in relation to their choices to delay marriage and childbirth, and their rejection of the modernist notion that this delay is a reaction against committed love bonds. I will now discuss the final conceptual paradox presented in my paper, love and equality, in the context of Sweden. However, this time, I introduce a new theoretical line of thinking, Harraway's (1991) notion of cyborg politics, not only to help make sense of the simultaneous maintenance of equality and romantic love ideals amongst my informants, but also retrospectively in relation to the previously mentioned conceptual paradoxes relating to rationality, self-development, and the conditions of emerging adulthood. Despite its broader relevance, I find it most suitable for the purpose of this study to present the theoretical concept of cyborg politics together with a discussion of equality and the conflicting language of feminist and identity theories, and expand from there.

### 7.1 Conceptualizing and Contextualizing Gender Equality

It is fitting to first contextualize equality as a major discursive force within Sweden. Equality and sameness (*jämlik/likhet*) have widely been considered to be historically prominent ideals within the

private and public sector in Sweden (Daun 1989, Östergren 2006). Today, Sweden is often hailed as a global leader in gender equality, however it wasn't until the 1960s that the fundamentals of gender roles in Sweden were truly questioned. In the meantime, the norms of married man as provider and head of the household and married woman as housewife and mother persisted (Melby, *et al.* 2008). While ideological rhetoric assumed the equality of all citizens in modern society, practical discourse on the matter continued to accept the notion of intrinsic gender division. In the 1960s and 70s, however, as women's participation in the labor market became increasingly important, political discourse regarding the equality of men and women in family policy came to the forefront, particularly in the form of parental leave debates (*ibid.*). By the 1980s, debates transitioned beyond the family into the workplace (*ibid.*). These ideals have affected national policy which, in turn, has effectively supported a narrowing gender inequality gap on the familial level. Sweden's national policies promote a dual earner/carer familial household through universal, tax financed provisions such as daycare, school lunches, parental leave, and leave reserved specifically for fathers (*ibid.*).

Along a similar theoretical vein as Foucault (1990) who claims that power now works through a normalization process, anthropologists have demonstrated how national policy can dictate discourse and shape aspects of the self (see Emilie Martin 1997). Since the 1970s, Sweden's pioneering social welfare policies have explicitly intended to do just that, serving to strengthen egalitarianism within the lives and relationships of Swedish men and women (NOSOSKO 2012). The strength of these policies, particularly those which make full-parental leave subsidies contingent upon use by fathers, have been effective in shaping people's chosen behavior as evidenced by increases in women's representation within the Swedish labour force (Sainsbury 1999, Haas, *et al.* 2006) and men's increasingly active role in caregiving (Hook 2006).

While these policies support equality as a discursive ideal and, to a certain extent, also its practice in the relationships of young Swedish couples today, structural inequalities and a replication of gender roles still persist. Recently, researchers have begun to compare attitudes and behavior with regard to egalitarian division of unpaid work amongst Swedish heterosexual couples. These studies reveal discrepancies both between couples' attitudes and behavior and between couples' expectations prior to childbirth and lived experience post-childbirth (Bernhardt, *et al.* 2013).

With regard to egalitarian heterosexual partnership, Giddens (1992) "pure relationship" model presents a strongly optimistic view of social change as marked by individual transformation of intimacy. He credits the women's movement to a transformation from traditional romantic love relationships to "pure relationship" (*ibid.*). This transformation of relationships between men and



women evidently emerges through a transformation of intimacy, leading to a “wholesale democratization of the interpersonal domain” (ibid). This modern intimacy is characterized by consistent reflexivity surrounding and maintenance of mutual disclosure, personal fulfillment and sexual openness. The ability of one’s partner to voluntarily end the relationship at any moment serves as an internal regulator of sorts, ensuring equal, reciprocal, intimate exchange to keep the relationship from ending.

Feminist literature has both built upon and critiqued aspects of Giddens’ “pure relationship” theory (1992). Popular Swedish feminist graphic novelist Liv Strömquist utilizes and builds upon theories of individualization, modern relationship structure and feminist theory to present (but does not explicitly give ways to resolve) a situation in which today’s individualistic, fragile monogamous relationships are inherently connected with sexual ownership and control under the guise of romantic love (Strömquist 2010).



Figure 3. By Liv Strömquist (2010)<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> English translation: “In our society, it is for instance considered normal that romantic love is very closely related to hate. If the person one’s in a relationship with for example in any way dissapoints you, the love can instantaneously be exchanged for a feeling of hostility, aggressive attacks or the feelings can just suddenly completely go away. “-I love you!” “-I slept with my personal trainer.” “-OK. Then I hate you.”



Figure 4. By Liv Strömquist (2010)<sup>7</sup>

Strömquist contrasts the seemingly false, ego-based needs which she believes drive many modern relationships with the ability to experience the generous giving and receiving of “real” love which, according to feminist theorist Bell Hooks, requires compassionate lovers who give up all notions of power, control and egoism (ibid). Bell Hooks (1999) ties the unequal power of relationships to patriarchal culture in which she believes men are “inclined to see love as something they should receive without expending effort.”



Figure 5. By Liv Strömquist (2010)<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> English translation: “If your love has an “opposite” then it’s not love, but rather a strong ego-based need of a more complete and deeper experience of yourself – a need that the other person is temporarily fulfilling.”

<sup>8</sup> English translation: “But as the American feminist Bell Hooks writes: The terrible price men pay to have power over us is the loss of the ability to give and receive love. To experience love, you have to give up all power.”

Strömqvist (2010) also borrows from Icelandic political scientist Anna G. Jónasdóttir's (1991) "love power" theory that the driving force behind patriarchal culture within "formally" equal societies of the contemporary west is the love relationship itself, between men and women. Jónasdóttir (ibid) claims that love can be divided between "ecstasy" and "care", and while men are socialized to exercise love via ecstasy within love relationships, women are taught they should do so via care. Like Giddens (1992), Strömqvist (2010) views love relationships as increasingly ego-based and suggests, through employing Jónasdóttir's (1991) "love force" theory, that contemporary exploitation of women's "love power" within individualized relationships branches out into all arenas in which men and women meet.

Sociologist Lynn Jamieson (1999), on the other hand, critiques Giddens' (1992) "pure relationship" theory for being dangerously simplistic and optimistic. Jamieson (ibid) questions Giddens' (1992) suggestion that a "transformation of intimacy" within individual relationships may be the catalyst for profound socio-political changes towards egalitarianism outside of the relationship. According to Jamieson (ibid), Giddens' (1992) claim seems strangely cut off not only from a wealth of relevant feminist research but also his previous discussions on the interactions between structure and action (ibid). Jamieson questions the view that intimacy is directly linked to democratizing gender relations outside of couple's relationship, but also the view that a couple's intimacy and sense of equality a truly equal distribution of power:

*"[...] empirical work on heterosexual couples routinely continues to find that men exercise more power than women in the partnerships: for example, having more choice concerning opting in and out of domestic work and child care (Brannen and Moss 1991), and exercising more control of money (Morris 1990; Pahl 1989; Vogler 1994). But at the same time, research continues to find couples exhibiting such inequalities who collaboratively generate a sense of caring, intimate, equal relationships. [...]"* (Jamieson 1999).

Jamieson (2011) suggests that the analytical potential of intimacy rests on the recognition that intimacy can reinscribe inequalities as well as destabilize them, and therefore the study of intimacy practices should be employed not only to explain social change but also continuity in an era of globalization. Even the most seemingly equal bonds, according to Jamieson (1999), do not resemble "pure relationship" as "any consequent politicization with and personal empowerment has not stemmed only from a preoccupation with their own relationship but a more general engagement with the outside world" (ibid). Furthermore, Jamieson critiques' Giddens' (1992) failure to reflexively consider the extent to which he leans on therapeutic literature to support his arguments,

literature with strong interest in discursively promoting the need to constantly “work” oneself in relation to intimacy and love relationships (ibid). The danger proposed in these theories builds off of sociologist David Morgan’s analysis (1991, 1992, 1996) of how twentieth-century narratives of familial and marital change have shifted ‘from institution to relationship,’ that is, from societal structures to individual couples’ experiences, thereby rendering influential structural inequalities invisible. “Extolling the values of mutual self-disclosure and ‘the pure relationship,’” claims Jamieson (1999), therefore “feeds into a therapeutic discourse that has sometimes been the antithesis of empowering for women and gays.”

Yet, if there is one aspect that much of feminist literature on the topic of heterosexual partnerships and “pure relationship” theory share with regard to the topic of heterosexual pair-bonding, it is the relegation of romantic love wholly to the realm of male dominance and women’s subordination. Simone de Beauvoir (1997) likens romantic love to a curse that entraps women within the feminine domain, and Shulamith Firestone (1970) scathingly critiques romantic love by positioning it as the evil root of women’s oppression. Romantic love therefore becomes a relic that must be overcome to enable egalitarian partnership, intimacy, or sexual behavior. This scathing view of romantic love in love relationships provides no non-hypocritical space for one to have both a romantic and an equal self. And yet, from the perspective of informants, romantic love livens up life and is something many hope never to live without.

This is where Donna Haraway’s cyborg theory comes into play (1991). Haraway critiques essentialism and deeply rooted binaries, i.e., nature/culture, man/woman, in radical and Marxist/socialist-feminist strains (ibid). She uses the utopic analogy of a cyborg; “a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction”, to advocate for the need not to reconcile the contradictions between feminist theory and identity theories, but instead to imagine a post-modern, post-gender utopian space that welcomes the irony, reversals, and fragmentation these contradictions entail (ibid). If one envisions the inherent contradiction of a cyborg, perhaps one can also envision the ways in which the “women’s experience” is both a fiction and a fact, and recognize the lived reality of domination while simultaneously working against the destructive tendency to essentialize or reduce it to “perfect communication” (ibid). It is along this theoretical vein, I assert, that one may better understand my informants’ views of love and self.

## 7.2 Equal Love and Parenthood

As mentioned, when I began my research, all six of my informants were in committed, long-term relationships. During the span of two years, two informants saw their relationships end (Ida and Jenny), two became pregnant and gave birth (Tora and Simone) and one married (Tora).

After having their first children, informants Tora and Simone each found that, as they had expected, they have less alone time and time with their partners. Tora, who has recently gone back to working full-time as a teacher, says she and her boyfriend Rikard plan “*a little bit of romantic time*” each week.

*Many times, it's very simple, a cosy night at home - dinner and ice cream maybe, a bath, or a game... or watching TV and cuddling and laughing on the couch. But other times, it's a planned activity out or a surprise. The only rule is that it has to be just about the two of us. [...] it's more of an attitude, or like, a mindset.*

Tora adds that it certainly helps that her boyfriend's family lives nearby and are regularly willing to assist with childcare. In terms of equal labour, Rikard now spends more time on domestic work and childcare than Tora. Tora explains this as a result of both personality and circumstance. Rikard works from home, aside from occasional meetings and trips to give lectures and seminars. Tora says that she took more parental leave than Rikard because his job pays a higher salary. During that time, she says, domestic chores and childcare were split more evenly. However, now that Tora is working full-time in the afternoons and evenings, Rikard spends more time cooking, cleaning, and caring for their child. “*We are a good team, and we do make an effort not to fall into gender roles. I would say it averages to about the equal amount of total hours working. Perhaps he [works] a little bit more even, since he is more particular about keeping things clean and orderly than I am.*” Tora and Rikard each take pride in their active engagements in multiple roles. Tora says: “*We never want become one of those parents whose life revolves only around their child. Then again, being a parent has transformed us both, more than we could have ever imagined.*”

Many aspects of the day-to-day life of Tora and Rikard seem to transgress and reverse conventional boundaries between domestic:nature:women/public:culture:man domains described and depicted by Simone de Beauvoir (1997) and Sherry Ortner (1974). For example, in the summer, Tora often took her child with her to work, and Rikard's daily work at home involves a constant shifting between both paid and unpaid work tasks. Each actively shifts between multiple

“selves” as parent, worker, and romantic partner and each works to maintain balance.

That said, it is also important to note that Tora and Rikard discuss equality and gender roles fairly regularly with one another as well as within social and social media spheres. They have agreed to make a conscious effort toward what they consider to be fair. In other words, their reworking of tasks and roles is distinctly reflexive and active. Furthermore, they each refer to aspects of their external environment as influencing their decisions regarding relationship and family structure as often as they discuss personal qualities as playing a role. This is exemplified in their opinion that Swedish welfare policy greatly affects their ability to construct what they know to be an egalitarian relationship. It is also exemplified by their decision for Tora to leave work and take the majority of the parental leave, which was based on Rikard’s higher salary and greater flexibility afforded to him by his job. Tora implies that both she and Rikard view this decision as reflective of larger structural inequalities between men and women in Sweden, *“Let’s just say, we know of a lot fewer husbands who have taken out leave because their wife makes more money.”* The active and reflexive nature of Tora and Rikard’s “equal relationship” and the interconnected way in which they view their daily lives in relation or opposition to external forces such as national policy and structural gender inequality. Thus, informants do not resonate with the optimism characteristic of Giddens’ “pure relationship” (1992) regarding the extent to which modern relationship structure can simply be equal, nor do they specifically associate the intimacy of bonds to be a central force for egalitarianism within a larger societal context. To them, having an equal relationship requires conscious effort and the interplay between egalitarian relationships and an egalitarian society are multidimensional.

As is well known among anthropologists, opposition to and rejection of certain identities also serves in the construction of one’s own (see Butler 2011). Not only is this seen in Tora and Rikard’s conscious efforts to avoid reinforcing what they consider to be unequal gender norms, but also through Tora’s mention of never wanting to be *“one of those parents.”* These words echo another topic related to identity construction continually brought up by my informants and friends of informants who are new parents. While informants and their friends do not describe their own situation as unequal or “overly” child focused, they will describe other couples’ situations in such terms. These “other” couples may be friends, friends of friends, acquaintances, or family members and are brought up as examples of couples who lead imbalanced lives. Informants’ description of parents who show an over-interest in children is also characterized by speculation that such parents lack substance, transcendence, or meaning within other aspects of their lives outside of parenting, for example, from unsatisfactory romantic relationships or jobs or a lack of intellectual or cultural interests. In other words, there is a concerted, reflexive effort to (and status involved with)

presenting a cosmopolitan image of the self as parent, but also so much more.

This leads to my second informant to become a parent during my research period, Simone. Unlike Tora, Simone's pregnancy was unplanned, and although she and her boyfriend Markus are now very positive to this turn of events, Simone was certainly not expecting to have a child at the time that she did, *"I had just turned twenty-five, which, at least amongst my friends, is rather early."* Simone describes social pressure to live up to a dual earner/carer ideal. Simone's eleven-month-period of parental leave will soon come to an end after which she plans to return to university studies to retrain so that she can shift her nursing specialization. Currently, Simone does most of the childcare and work within the home and her boyfriend Markus works full-time as a teacher. *"It's of course a huge change [to adjust to] being a mom, but I feel very lucky to have this time to bond with her [Simone's daughter]. [...] It wasn't a hard choice. He's older and his job pays better and I didn't like my job at all and I wanted to change."* Simone considers she and Markus to be equal contributors to the family and attempt to keep work hours relatively equal. *"He's great with the child care when he comes home. It gives me a much needed break."* Furthermore, she attributes her relationship to giving her a level of security and personal freedom that she doesn't believe she would have otherwise. *"If he didn't have his job and we weren't together, I think it would be much more difficult for me to study for a year and then find a new job - now with a kid."* However, she believes others may not view it under the same light, *"I feel like some of my friends judge us and me especially- and maybe also feel bad for me, I don't really care. I know what I'm doing, and what I want."* Simone also looks forward to an extra year of university studies as it will give her a bit more time to spend with her daughter. In terms of romantic relationship, Simone feels things have changed, but not worsened. *"Before we could go out or have late nights just talking - no time for that anymore. Now, we share something else though. Knowing that you have someone who loves and cares for you and your child so much that they would do anything for you. That is really romantic to me."*

Considering the individualistic ideal to maintain a sense of self beyond the role of parent, together with the bonding function I argue love serves in Swedish partnerships, one can see why informants Tora and Simone would find it so important to reconcile the coexistence of romantic love and parenting within their relationships. On top of this, according to informants, love and care within a house should also be equal. As I have mentioned, the ideal of equality is prominent in Sweden, and therefore, a couple may risk judgement if they do not fit a dual earner/carer ideal. Critiques of the pure relationship model include its deemphasize of "care" in favor of mutual disclosure as the foundation for egalitarian relationships. According to Jamieson (1999), "Love and care as expressed by a more practical doing and giving is as much the crux of their relationship, as

a process of mutually discovering and enjoying each other.” Attempts to measure equality in relationships in terms of active care, however, are challenging at best. Financial support, emotional council, advice or assistance with job matters, cooking, cleaning and childcare could all be considered examples of what informants see as caring contributions to the relationship/familial unit. However, research conducted on dual-worker households in England has suggested that a concerted amount of energy and efforts by romantic partners can go into disguising inequalities, for instance by “talking up” men’s contributions to child care or domestic work, (Brannen and Moss 1991, Hochschild 1990).

If love must be equal in contemporary Sweden, it would perhaps be impossible to claim a relationship to be unequal if one is within, to borrow Lindholm’s term, a “love-world” (2006). Given this, and the fact that I have not lived with any of these couples for an extended period of time, I by no means seek to make judgements or comparisons to how equal informants’ relationships are. I do however, wish to highlight the entangled circumstances surrounding the ideals of equality and romantic love in informants’ relationships, particularly once a child enters the picture and equality ideals are to be actualized in new ways, and how circumstances lead to differences in conceptualization of both equality and romantic love between informants.

### **7.3 Equal Love and Break Ups**

As I’ve mentioned in my discussion of romantic love and rationality, the relationship dissolution (or break ups) that informants experienced during my research period changed their views on the extent to which they considered their respective relationships to be “equal”. How to understand these changes is a difficult question. One could just as easily associate a retrospective change of opinion regarding a relationship (i.e., finding it unfair or harmful) with a previous blindness involved with a state of being within a love-world as with a blindness of now being outside of one looking in (i.e., bitterness, lack of control, or the need to reaffirm a decision to end a relationship). It is also certainly possible, given previous research on couples’ opinions regarding the equality of their own relationships, that my informants downplayed or refused to acknowledge inequalities to me as a researcher in order to maintain the equal love ideal (Brannen and Moss 1991, Hochschild 1990). A mutual effort may succeed in constructing a feeling of equality within a love-world, even amongst the couple themselves, in spite of inequality.

Giddens suggests that the reason that couples’ relationships are more likely to dissolve in modern times is that there is a difficult psychological balance connected to individualized partnerships between maintaining mutual trust and knowing that the relationship is only good “until



further notice” (Giddens 1992: 63). On the other hand, according to Jamieson (1999), the fragility of modern heterosexual bonds is more likely a “consequence of the tension between strengthening cultural emphasis on intimacy, equality and mutuality in relationships and the structural supports of gender inequalities, which make these ideals difficult to attain.” I introduced Ida’s uncoupling and the surprise she felt upon learning that her sambo was in love with someone else in Chapter 5. Looking back on her relationship’s end, Ida describes a complete lack of awareness of the coming news of her *sambo*’s decision to leave, followed by a continual preoccupation with looking back or revisiting the moments leading up to the relationship’s end to discover what had gone wrong and could have been done differently. She also describes an exceedingly frustrating inability to stop thinking of and longing for her previous partner. Ida’s difficulty in moving on, particularly within a city to which she moved specifically to be with (and associates strongly with) her previous partner, suggests a difficult situation in which jointly upheld identities related to one’s relationship and the ideals of romantic love, commitment, and fairness are simultaneously and unwillingly taken. Five months after her relationship ended, Ida describes continuing difficulty to “move forward”: *“Right now, I’m worried [my] feelings will never go away, like that was it. He was the one for me.”* Ida’s sudden sense of loss resembles the narratives of partners in Diane Vaughan’s (1986) case study of the process of modern relationships’ end. Vaughan (1986) describes a similar process across categories of class, gender, sexual orientation, and relationship status (married or unmarried). The process, according to Vaughan (ibid), often involves Partner A’s growing discontentment, establishment of an external confidant, an explorative testing of an uncoupled identity, the transmitting of subtle warning signs, followed by an often dramatic reveal upon which Partner B suddenly experiences a distinct sense of loss not experienced at any prior point of the detachment process.

The uncoupling process for my informant Jenny, the initiator of her uncoupling process from her partner of eight years, also resembles Vaughan’s description of the uncoupling process but from the perspective of Partner A rather than Partner B (1986). For example, during the process, Jenny experienced growing discontentment that she kept largely to herself. She eventually began to confide in one close friend in addition to a potential new love interest, described imagining herself as single and spending more time *“out with friends without him, doing my own thing,”* and finally decided to separate and move into another apartment with a friend. Looking back, Jenny describes this process in addition to her reasons for initiating the end of the relationship to me in retrospect, *“He started traveling a lot for work. He treated his job as the most important thing. More [important] than us [the relationship], and my job. [...] Then I started to feel and act more single. [...] When we spent time together, I didn’t feel good anymore. Like... I was disconnected, and I*

*didn't want to be close to him.*" Jenny also attributes problems in her partnership to a tense relationship between herself and her partner's parents, *"They were so old fashioned. They never took my job seriously like his. [They thought] my main job was to take care of their son or something."*

Both Ida's and Jenny's recollections of their own uncoupling processes support Jamieson's (1999) notions that discrepancies today between expectations and outcome of experience of equality could play a major role in the fragility of bonds, and that these perceived discrepancies are just as likely to concern actions as mutual disclosure. Furthermore, Jenny's reference to her boyfriend's parents is an example of the ways in which modern relationship tensions can be enhanced if one's notions of relationship equality may be challenged by traditional gender norms. One could argue that this is simply an outcome of society having not yet reached a stage in which pure relationship (or even confluent love) has fully replaced traditional or romantic love sentiments, even in Sweden. However, as my informants are educated women with middle class backgrounds, I question the extent to which such a theory not only de-emphasizes the stubborn hold of imbalanced expectations and experiences of gender equality, but also the perseverance and nearly sacred spot romantic love sentiments still holds, at least amongst my informants and their equivalents.

## **7.4 Equal Love and Cyborgs**

One way to attempt to avoid the indelible essentialisms implicit in the view that relationships are losing traditional, romantic ties and gaining a rational, democratic approach is to re-envision informants through the lens of Donna Haraway's cyborg allegory (1991). Welcoming the risk of contradicting herself, Haraway imagines a utopian scenario in which feminist theory and postmodern identity theories can coincide, an imaginary scenario that avoids essentialism without denying inequality and domination (ibid). I take this theory up because, at the very least, it acknowledges certain paradoxical aspects and characteristics of my informants' outlooks on love as acceptable but also understandable, maybe even appreciated. My informants, many of whom identify (to various extents) with the feminist movement and seek and work to maintain equal relationships also maintain seemingly unshakeable commitments to romantic love sentiments. Furthermore, they reflexively relate their relationships to the existence of structural inequalities and acknowledge that these inequalities affect specific relationship decisions (i.e., who takes parental leave), however they by no means see their own love relationships to be defined by inequalities.

I argue that this reflects a cyborg-like joining of the ideals of romantic love and equality, identities of the “selfless” lover/carer and the democratic/rational equal partner, amongst my Swedish informants. If one must be in love to maintain a relationship, and the relationship must be equal for the love to be real, then despite any level of rational reflexivity as to the conditions of others’ love-worlds, it would be nearly impossible to admit to one’s own love-world as being unequal, that is, until it is over. In other words, while carried out and identified in various manners, all informants aspired to relationship ideals characterized both by a romantic state of mind and balanced-reciprocal exchange in a seemingly mutually dependent way. More importantly, I bring up Haraway’s cyborg theory because it resonates with the informants’ own views of themselves and their relationships in connection to (or in lack of connection to) conventional feminist and modern theoretical notions of domestic/public, nature/culture, rational/romantic, and man/woman. Informants transgress and reverse such boundaries, at times actively (intentionally) and at others seemingly without a reflective thought. While aspiring to a “forever” love ideal and seeing parenthood as a transformative experience, they simultaneously refrain from any fixed definition of parenthood, romantic love, adulthood or womanhood. They see themselves as individual, active agents within their relationships and the outside world, but also refer to their relationships in connection and reaction to national policies, structural inequalities and a generation of delayed adults. Furthermore, there is a distinct unwillingness on the part of informants to do away with commitment and romantic love ideals, and in its place, an inclination to reconceptualize them, disassociate them, or see them as simply “of this time” rather than lingering patriarchal or traditional relics. They take an active part in love, personalize it, and “equalize” it. Judging from the length of current Swedish relationships (despite uniquely nationally and socially encouraged individualism), the committed, long-term partnership is still a prominent social norm, and romantic love may serve as an increasingly essential structural glue. However, after discussing these “equal love-worlds” with informants before and after uncoupling, the cyborg allegory becomes all the more relevant, as these same informants conceive of these same “love-worlds” in relation to a range of paradoxes real and mythical, secure and dangerous, faithful and treacherous, crucially equal yet, from the perspective of the newly uncoupled, possibly unequal all along.

## 8. Conclusion

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This study has analyzed informant interviews in relation to previous research across social and behavioral science disciplines to explore how young Swedish women living in heterosexual cohabiting partnerships conceive of romantic love in relation to their own lives and partnerships. With a reputation as a global forerunner of demographic shifts and defamilization connected to increasing individualization and globalization, one might expect a general movement away from romantic love sentiments and towards more rational, equal and casual exchanges in Sweden, more similar to Giddens “pure relationship” model (1992). However, I assert that in attempting a closer look at young adults in Sweden today, we see, if not a different, then a significantly more multifaceted story.

Recent reversals in marriage and childbearing rates in Sweden question any previously assumed trends in lack of commitment to romantic love and partnership ideals amongst contemporary Swedish young adults (Bergnéhr 2007, Bernhardt & Goldschneider 2007, Ohlsson 2009). Furthermore, informants’ commitments to romantic love and monogamous partnerships can be seen in their ability to “rationalize” these ideals as modern and secure and assume their love relationships to be equal while within a “love-world”, doubting such assumptions only when situated outside of the “love-world” in question. This suggests an assumption by informants that “real” love and equality must go hand in hand. Informants expect their relationships to be equal, but also to be romantic, caring, monogamous and committed, and see no paradox in this assortment of affinities.

In the context of emerging adulthood, informants also seek a sense of security and escape through their love partnerships. For informants, the decision to delay marriage and family is complex and varied, but it did not signal decreased interest in romantic love. If anything, they view such delays as signaling the increased prioritization of romance amongst members of their generation. The variation in informants’ reasons for delaying marriage and family ranges from a personal choice to focus on self-development first, to an effort to avoid divorce and “get it right the first time”, to a symptom of global societal trends slowing young people’s transitions to adulthood and keeping their lives unwillingly in flux. Whichever the reason given, the romantic ideal to find someone special with whom to share one’s life remains largely unquestioned.

All informants aspired to relationship ideals characterized by a romantic state of mind as well as a balanced-reciprocal exchange in a seemingly mutually dependent way. It could be said

that informants display a combination of traits which Giddens (1992) associates with romantic love, confluent love and pure relationship. With regard to romantic love sentiments, informants want to feel as though they have found someone especially right for them, and someone with which they can eventually build a loving family. That said, these informants also value confluent love sentiments such as independence and self-development and believe that constant mutual disclosure and maintenance of intimacy are vital factors for the survival of a love relationship. Informants also describe periods within their own lives which more closely resemble Giddens' "pure relationship" structure (ibid), however, these periods are considered exploratory phases and nothing to which to aspire in the future. As the ideals of emotion/rationality and equality/romance are often depicted to be at odds with one another from a theoretical standpoint, I employ Haraway's cyborg analogy (1991) to help describe informants' joining of such seemingly paradoxical ideals and transgressions of associated boundaries in ways which they themselves consider unproblematic.

In the future, I hope to see more scholarly inquiry into gendered constructions of rationality and romantic love in Sweden and the implications of such a gendered duality in contemporary academic research on the matter. I would also advocate for a deeper questioning of the pervasive notion amongst social theorists that romantic love sentiments are of the past; historical precursors to a more rational modern relationship structure (with Sweden leading the way), as recent Swedish demographic trends and attitudinal studies on Swedish youth complicate and confound this picture. I hope for future research to contribute to an interdisciplinary understanding of romantic love and contemporary relationships in Sweden by investigating, more comprehensively than this thesis allows, the social and behavioral significance of romantic love sentiments as a contemporary bonding tool. Such research could help explain the ways in which contemporary romantic sentiments reinscribe and/or subvert inequalities as well as investigate the possibility that elements of individualization and globalization may, in fact, contribute to an increase in the importance of romantic love in the contemporary Swedish society.

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