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Editorial: On Love

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What is love? Is it an uncontrollable emotion? Is it, instead, socially shaped, both an emotion and a social practice? Can the bonds of care and affection between humans and non-human animals be said to be on a par with parent-child relationships between humans? Do parents owe love to their children – and do mothers and fathers, respectively, owe it to different degrees? Do subversive weddings challenge normative ideals about love? What is the significance of love for the value of close personal or family relationships? All these questions and more are discussed in the articles included in this special issue. The contributors draw from a variety of disciplines including philosophy, sociology, political science, religious studies, and history, as well as from empirical work that they have undertaken in Canada, Belgium, Portugal, or Romania. From these different perspectives and experiences, each contribution addresses important questions about love and its relation to sexuality, monogamy, friendship, the family, parenthood, or society in general.

The theme

From the balance between moral agency and uptake of responsibility for love's beginning and its ending (Ciurria 2018), to ambivalence in the face of innovations in ways of looking for love (Pozsar et al 2018), this special issue explores love and its challenges in the contemporary world. Several of the contributions address the way in which love has been used to keep women's interests subsumed to those of their male partners (Uiorean 2018, Sadler 2018) or those of their children (Jacobs & Hens 2018, Green 2018). This has often been accomplished with the support of the expectation that (heterosexual) romantic love is essential for women's fulfillment. By placing the nuclear family, created by romantic love, in the center of our adult lives, all other loves are moved to the sides. Against this background, the authors of the articles included in this special issue contribute to 'rehabilitating' other instantiations of love that are either non-romantic (Gheaus

2018, Piazzesi et al 2018), non-monogamous (Brake 2018, Clardy 2018), non-heterosexual (Santos 2018), or altogether cross-species (Stewart 2018).

The belief that a heterosexual romantic relationship is essential for human flourishing has a name, 'amatonormativity', coined by philosopher Elizabeth Brake. The term denotes

> *the assumption that a central, exclusive, amorous relationship is normal for humans, in that it is a universally shared goal, and that such a relationship is normative, in the sense that it should be aimed at in preference to other relationship types. The assumption that valuable relationships must be marital or amorous devalues friendships and other caring relationships. (Brake 2012: 88-89).*

Research on friendship between adults confirms the surrender to the social script of the primacy of the family over friendship that takes place in many adults' lives. For example, a recent study of friendship between men in Sweden found that although they valued their friendships greatly, they felt they had to negotiate partial withdrawals from them once they embarked on a serious (heterosexual) romantic relationship (Goedecke 2018). Even as it has become socially acceptable that one will have several romantic partners in one's lifetime, these are still one's "other halves", "significant others", or "soulmates" – at least until proven otherwise. Friends, on the other hand, are not – at least not as adults, and even when one has had one enduring close friend for life and multiple, serial romantic "other halves".

If the form of elective family that is the romantic relationship has dissolved, the relationship is said to have "failed" and we were simply mistaken to have started it in the first place: our other half was not our other half after all. Friendship, on the other hand, tends to lack both this requirement of exclusivity and the all or nothing approach in relation to its temporality: someone may no longer be a close friend today, but that in itself need not mean anything about whether the relationship was "real" friendship when it was ongoing. Romantic love and the family could be enriched in this way by being *more like friendship* – as Gheaus suggests in this special issue – instead of cutting our intimate relationships to size and emptying them of meaning as soon as they no longer fit the narrative of the successful romantic relationship.

In a paper published almost three decades ago, psychologist Esther Rothblum invited her readers to imagine an alternative scenario of a society in which the expectations surrounding friendship and romantic love are switched (Rothblum 1999). One is only allowed to have one friend. Friendship is celebrated in Friendship Commitment Ceremonies where the happy couple invites all their close ones, including lovers and family. While one may have multiple lovers, care

is warranted to avoid becoming more than "just lovers". Friendship with others, when you already have a friend, amounts to cheating and is frowned upon. Fiction and music are sources of countless examples of happy friendships that all are encouraged to aspire to. Declaring one's friendship status is a requirement on a host of official documents. The end of a friendship is a life-changing event that everyone acknowledges as such.

Rothblum does not suggest that such a scenario be enacted. Instead, she uses it to question what she calls "the culture of sex" of the Western world, established conventions of what counts as sex, and current definitions of friendship, especially in relation to coupledom. She calls for a "friendship revolution", a reorganization of the way we structure close personal relationships, which would displace sexual intimacy from center stage, and replace it with friendship. For Rothblum, this would be particularly beneficial for women, by shattering the expectation that they should invest in their sexual attractiveness, and instead encouraging them to invest in other ways of relating – such as friendship.

Rothblum is not the only one who has contrasted norms around friendship and romantic love to reveal contradictions in how we conceptualize love. For example, philosopher Maren Behrensen discusses the requirement that romantic love is necessarily exclusive by comparing it with expectations concerning friendship and parental love. Loving several friends or several children need not subtract from the love that we feel for each friend and each child. While there are limits to how many people we can love, as friends, lovers, or parents, it is only in the case of romantic love that the limit is expected to be "1" (Behrensen 2014).

More recently, philosopher Harry Chalmers imagines a couple in which partners have agreed to exclusivity not only in their romantic relationship, but also in friendship: they will be each other's friend, and no one else's. Violating this expectation, by befriending other people, may bring about the end of their relationship. This is problematic, argues Chalmers, because friendship is an important human good, and supporting our beloved in their pursuit of important human goods is part of what it means to love. However, romantic love is also an important human good. Like friendship, it contributes meaning to our lives, and connects us with others in intimate ways. Chalmers' argument is that the requirement of monogamy in romantic love is morally impermissible, in the same way in which a requirement of monogamy in friendship is (Chalmers 2018).

Rothblum, Behrensen, and Chalmers invite us to consider romantic love, and the norms that surround it, amidst other kinds of love, and the norms that surround *them*, and to reflect on the extent to which the norms of romantic love are justifiable. The "friendship revolution" that Rothblum envisioned is that of a dynamic between friendship, romantic love, and the family, that diverges from the amatonormative script. A "love revolution", which renders all loves equal in value and frees love from the realm of social or personal expectation, seems to be one of the take-home reflections of this special issue. Love is not exclusive or species-bound, is not owed even where it is needed, and it does not need to be socially accepted in order to redeem itself.

In the following, I will briefly present the articles included in this special issue.

The articles

In her article, "Love as emotion *and* social practice", Brook Sadler shows how society shapes our views about love in specific directions. The social practice of love and of the importance of 'erotic affiliation', Sadler claims, reveals underlying tensions regarding the place and the status of women in liberal democracies. Not all or any love is equally valued socially; not all or any love is supposed to overwhelm us. Romantic love is awarded a special status that pushes other kinds of love to the margins and relegates them to secondary status in comparison.

Romantic love is not just one of several kinds of love, alongside, for example, love between close friends. It is, as Sadler puts it, "the defining pursuit of adult life (…) central to individual identity". By hiding this expectation behind the portrayal of romantic love as an uncontrollable emotion, we collectively prevent ourselves from taking responsibility for placing romantic love on such a high pedestal – and for accepting that it is thus elevated. We don't simply perceive our emerging feelings directly as they are, but we interpret them with the tools that we have been given, we *translate* them using the social language, the shared beliefs, within which we lead our lives. In that way, love is not only an emotion, but also a social practice, and we share in responsibility for the ways in which we interpret it.

Justin Clardy looks at how the social meaning of a word (such as 'player') is dependent on the linguistic community in which it is used, in a way that influences its potential to praise or denigrate. For Carrie Jenkins, writing about the consequences of being labeled promiscuous, there

is no male equivalent to "slut" in potential to denigrate. 'Player' for Jenkins "sounds like somebody who has a lot of fun" (Jenkins 2017: 139). In African American English, however, "player" denotes a man who is dishonest and takes advantage of women. This is important in the context of polyamory - or consensual non-monogamy - because a polyamorous man may not cheat or take advantage of his partners, but still be labeled a 'player'.

The label therefore forces a stereotype onto African American polyamorous men, regardless of whether they actually do display the characteristics imputed to them in this way (such as dishonesty and manipulation). This is further aggravated by the hyper-sexualization that black men have been subjected to historically. Because polyamorous men are not dishonest with their partners, they are not players. Therefore, concludes Clardy, against the background of amatonormativity, labeling African American polyamorous men as 'players' denigrates them and denies them respectability for their non-monogamous choices.

In Clardy's paper, we see how amatonormativity can work with race and gender to raise challenges for African American polyamorous men. In the next paper of this special issue, Elizabeth Brake looks at whether polyamorous weddings (weddings between more than two lovers) succeed in challenging the ideals of amatonormativity. Are they even weddings at all? And if they are weddings, are they a step towards assimilation into the fixed roles of romantic love ideals, by giving in to a version of amatonormativity? Are they, on the contrary, a step towards the weakening of the grip that these ideals have upon lovers?

Subversive polyamorous weddings bring forth a challenge to widely socially embraced ideals of the necessary exclusivity and constancy of romantic love. The specific challenge that polyamorous weddings raise hits at the core of these ideals, by positing a version of romantic love that allows multiple parties. Romantic love is supposed to be exclusive between only two parties – but polyamorous weddings welcome more than two; the one lover is supposed to be one's irreplaceable soulmate – but polyamorous weddings allow for more soulmates. Instead of symbolizing the uniqueness and irreplaceability that weddings do, polyamorous weddings celebrate openness to the possibility that one can love romantically more than one. They celebrate ongoing consent rather than promises that cannot be made: such as that the love one feels today will always be there, for the same recipient, and only for that person, come what may (see also Brake 2011, 2012).

Oana Uiorean discusses Plato's *Symposium*, looking at how the sharp distinctions and hierarchies apparent in the speeches therein are reflected in contemporary gendered roles and expectations. Awkwardness in relation to women and women's roles in the reproduction of mankind seethes throughout the words of Plato's speakers – and especially those of Pausanias.

In the *Symposium*, love between men is elevated to no less than celestial realms – if performed properly. Love, and men, aim at higher levels of achievement, while women belong in the home and their energy is bound to the realm of the reproduction of society and its citizens. Uiorean shows how, while Plato's ideal of homoerotic love has been replaced with the ideal of heterosexual love, the latter perpetuates the same function of gendering the domestic sphere and disciplining women in well-defined roles.

Against the quintessentially contemporary background of neuroscience, Delphine Jacobs and Kristien Hens illustrate the expectations that women owe duties of love to their family members, by looking into the *scientific* claim that parents, and especially mothers, owe love to their children. This claim is informed by biology and neurology research according to which love is essential for children's adequate brain development. Responsibility for providing this love is placed on the parents, and especially on the mother.

Jacobs and Hens use their research on the diagnosis of autism to explore the road from blaming mothers for their children's non-typical neurological development, to lifting that blame, only to then blame them again. Even as it exculpates parents from the blame of not having parented well enough, the neurological diagnosis of a child compounds the pressure put on parents to love their children *in the right way*. In order for the endeavor to support children in their development to work, a less simplistic view of biology is required, Jacobs and Hens argue. Not least, a broader view of moral responsibility for children – as more than parental or maternal – as well as a less reductionist understanding of love, are also required.

Deidre Green emphasizes some of the contradictions of conceptualizing maternal love as something that children have a right to. Not only is love not the kind of response that can be claimed of someone, but the imposition of such a claim is a threat to women's very agency. While

children do have legitimate claims on their parents, which include a claim to a mother's care, responsibility, and respect, love itself is not one of them.

Instead, Green develops an account of maternal love as a gift. The gift framework, Green shows, avoids the subordination of women's interests and agency to those of their children. Moreover, it allows greater agency for both the mother and the child.

Michelle Ciurria contrasts our attitudes to falling in love and to romantic break-ups, respectively. While both experiences share essential properties, such as a lack of control and of psychological continuity, we are more inclined to take responsibility for, and to feel in control of, falling in love, than breaking-up. This is in line with an asymmetry in the perception of responsibility that is common in neurotypical people: we tend to feel more responsible for positive than for negative events (such as falling in love, and breaking up, respectively). This tendency for "self-serving bias", Ciurria shows, has benefits for human functioning.

Some of us, however, feel more responsible for negative events than for positive events. Depression, for example, tends to make us prone to take on *too much* responsibility for negative events, in a way that impairs our functioning. Others see themselves as the cause of only good things (such as positive romantic experiences) and fail to admit responsibility for negative events (such as romantic break-ups) to such a degree that they are unable to relate to others: they are narcissists. From the perspective of the moral enhancement theory of responsibility, which Ciurria employs in the article, we need to support each other to care and to take responsibility where it is due: but only to the extent that it allows us to maintain or improve our moral agency.

In "Love, not the family", Anca Gheaus makes the radical claim that what is most valuable in family relations is love. The family, however, has no monopoly on love. Throughout the Western world, it is expected that adults will privilege the family; that family brings obligations in private life that close personal relationships (such as friendship) do not. For example, children are born or brought into family relationships to which they cannot consent, either because they didn't exist, or because, in the case of adoption, they were too young to do so[1]. Social expectations

[1] In a minority of cases, children are adopted at older ages and their consent is sought. The degree to which this consent is *free* is however doubtful, considering that the choice may be between having a home and a family and *not* having them. Even if older children are deemed to have capacity to consent, all the conditions of informed consent, especially those regarding the decision being free, are not met, because of the vulnerability presupposed by their very

or legal provisions that, as adults, they care for their parents, and the expectation that they show some degree of unconditional partiality towards other relatives, capture the assumption that they are bound for life to family relationships.

The high standard of commitment expected from family relationships may compromise moral integrity, argues Gheaus – especially when one is expected to *stay close* to family members, regardless of whether they are people we would otherwise want to be close with – and may be detrimental to human flourishing. Commitments that originate in love, however, such as those between close friends, derive from the relationship, rather than from external constraints. Rather than placing the family and its constraints in the center, Gheaus places love and friendship: it is loving friendship, rather than family, that should be at the core of our closest personal relationships, whether with friends or with family members.

Another prospect of a realignment between friendship and romantic love is presented in the next article. Chiara Piazessi, Martin Blais, Julia Lavigne and Catherine Lavoie Mongrain analyse the interplay between "love semantics", or the narrative of love, and changing social norms. They do so by focusing on the tribulations of four fictional women as they are depicted in a North-American TV series, *La Galère*. This case study does not lend itself smoothly to the dichotomies "traditional *vs* modern" and "romantic *vs* partnership" – as one might expect, in line with literature on contemporary love paradigms. Instead, it reveals an integration between all these elements, as the four protagonists of the series navigate societal norms and expectations in relation to women and their experience of love, intimacy, gender identity, and power relationships.

The women disrupt the romantic script (for example, by sharing a home together rather than with their male partners), while they seek certain parts of it (for example, passionate love). Faced with the difficulties of sharing mundane household tasks while keeping the relationship passionate, they rearrange their intimate relationships in a way more likely to allow them both equality in the home, and passion in their romantic connections. This disconnects household-related expectations from the romantic relationship, relegates the home to friendship, and from this altered starting point re-opens negotiation within the romantic relationship. *La Galère*, the authors suggest,

circumstances. The consent that adults give to entering or remaining in an intimate relationship with other adults can likewise be vitiated by a lack of freedom, caused for example by poverty or social pressure.

illustrates both women' reflexivity in facing the challenges of romantic love, and the supportive potential of friendship between women.

Access to assisted reproductive technologies by same-sex female couples and single women is far from guaranteed throughout Europe. In France and Italy, for example, only heterosexual couples are allowed to avail themselves of such treatments. In Romania, access by single women is frowned upon, and not included in state funded programs. Where funding exists, it is reserved for heterosexual couples. Parenting by same-sex partners is not recognized in Romanian law. In theory, what explains these restrictions is the way in which infertility is defined in most legislatures, as the failure of a heterosexual couple to produce children via sexual intercourse. In this way, same-sex couples and single individuals are *defined away* at the outset as not suffering from the disease of infertility, and are thus excluded by default.

In Portugal, same-sex female couples have had access to reproductive technologies since 2016, and Ana Santos illustrates some of the outcomes and pitfalls of these legislative changes. She does so against the background of "the motherhood regime", the expectation that women become mothers and perform motherhood in a socially sanctioned way. For the women she interviewed, this has opened up not only possibilities to seek support in becoming mothers, but also to experience societal expectations of what good motherhood is. Santos shows how, upon the removal of barriers to reproductive technologies, the effects of the insidious social expectation that sexuality is redeemed by reproduction contribute to render same-sex female couples acceptable *because* they become mothers. At the same time, by embarking on this journey, they cannot but disrupt norms about parenthood. For Santos, this disruption is a call for "decolonizing motherhood" by queering reproduction and parental love.

There is a growing amount of research into the use of mobile dating apps. However, most of this research is undertaken in a Western context. Maria Pozsar, Alina Dumitrescu, Denisa Piticas and Sorana Constantinescu investigate the perceptions of Romanian young women having used such apps. Romanian youth tend to be more conservative than their Western counterparts – and sometimes than their own parents – and ambivalent as to the appropriateness of online dating.

This ambivalence is apparent throughout the study. The authors explored the disruptive potential of these apps in relation to traditional forms of dating. They found that the users of the

apps tended to be both less conservative than the general population in their age group, and conflicted between their adherence to conservative values and their own negative perception of the very use of such apps.

The last article of the special issue goes beyond love between humans, to investigate the nature of the relationships between humans and their non-human companions – specifically cats and dogs. Although human knowledge of non-human lives has made tremendous progress in recent years, in ways that have influenced how one is permitted to treat animals, Heather Stewart claims that the revision of human-animal relationships has not gone far enough. Her argument is that the relation between the human caregiver and their 'pet' shares many of the essential properties of parent-child relationships, to such an extent that we should reconceptualize them as parental rather than proprietary in nature.

Indeed, the status quo is that human caregivers are their pets' "owners". In Romanian, they are their pets' "masters" (*stăpâni*). This is at odds with the increasing social and legal recognition of animals' moral status. Stewart's proposal departs from this status quo. It invites the readers to reflect on the meaning and reasoning behind kinds of recognition of inter-species caring relationships, and to consider the benefits for both human carers and non-human companions of recognizing their relationship as a form of parenthood.

The above is only a brief review of the contributions included in this special issue on *Analyzing Love*. I hope to have provided enough of a glimpse into the work of the authors to stimulate the readers to look more closely at the articles themselves. The breath of the approaches represented in this special issue will have something to offer to any reader who is interested in reflecting on how love *works* in our societies.

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Love as Emotion and Social Practice: A Feminist Perspective

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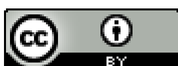
Abstract: I argue that love is both an emotion and a social practice. First, I observe that erotic or romantic love is often thought to be a passive, overwhelming, physically intense, a-rational, and individual experience. In opposition to these assumptions, I sketch a view of emotions that reveals their rational, willful, and social nature. Seen in this way, the emotion of love is something that can be re-invented through attention to social norms and institutions. Next, I advance the idea that emotions can be social practices. How we think about love, the norms for love, and our ideas about love, including popular ideas about love as an emotion, constitute the social practice of love. Looking at the contemporary American context, I argue that the social practice of love provides a bolster for patriarchy. Because romantic love is closely linked to marriage, it participates in limiting women's choices about family, career, and civic and political engagement. The preeminent place of romantic love in women's lives diverts women's attention from other forms of love, including female friendship and love of meaningful work. Discourses of love, which emphasize love as an overwhelming emotion beyond our control, function to foreclose feminist scrutiny of patriarchal practices. Without rejecting the positive nature of erotic love, I recommend a feminist reinvention of the practice of love. My argument draws upon varied resources from philosophy and cultural studies.

Keywords: love, emotion, social practice, patriarchy, marriage.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Introduction

We must reinvent love.

I offer this as a statement of fact, not an imperative: we must reinvent love because we cannot but help reinventing it. Love is a social practice and as such will be reinvented as society changes. The question is not *whether* love will be reinvented, but *how*, and *who* will have a say in its design.

I say that love is a social practice, but it is also an emotion, and several common ideas about emotions may make it difficult to see how an emotion can be a social practice, how love can be a social practice, and therefore how a reinvention could be necessitated. So, I begin by dispelling a few claims about emotions in order to clear the way for us to consider love as a social practice and to critically examine the current practice of love. My aim is to bring into view a picture of how love functions in the United States today. I hope to enable us to see that this practice of love reflects deep cultural tensions—specifically an unresolved conflict over the status of women in a liberal democracy. By learning to see (romantic or erotic) love as a social practice, we can reveal ways in which women under patriarchy are diverted from full participation in civic, social, economic, and political life.

Common Assumptions about Emotion

Love is often thought to be an emotion, a matter of feeling rather than reason, of the heart rather than the head. As such, it is commonly believed that love is a passion, an experience in which one is essentially *passive*: one falls in love, rather than striding toward it. Love is imagined to be beyond our control, non-voluntary, even a mystery or a force that exceeds human comprehension. Such notions are not limited to folk understandings or romantic comedies; many philosophers embrace some subset of these ideas: that love defies explanation, accountability, or prediction, that it lies beyond the reach of the human will, or that it is exempt from rational scrutiny. Moreover, this particular emotion, love, is often believed to be especially powerful, exerting tremendous motivational influence, with the capacity to overtake many aspects of thought and feeling, deeply affecting deliberation and decision-making.

This powerful emotion is, in its intensity and particularity, described as a kind of a-rational excess visited upon an individual. The lover's focus on her or his beloved cannot be fully explained

by the properties of the beloved; no matter how wonderful the beloved person really is, her or his *wonderfulness* is not sufficient reason to command the love and attention the lover bestows upon the beloved.[1] In other words, the lover's emotional response to the beloved is not a rational or objective matter, which others could come to share on the basis of the same evidence (the beloved's wonderfulness). Love is subjective, and as such it is an experience of the *individual*--it is the *individual* who is steeped in love.

The lover's experience is also physical: perhaps he cannot eat or sleep normally; his heart races at the sight of the beloved; he walks with a new spring in his step; his body is enlivened with a vital energy—part lust, but more than this, a yearning and vibrancy that shows in spontaneous gestures, unexpected outbursts of song, or a sudden impulse to jump, leap over park benches, or bound across open space, playful and infused with an unaccountable vitality. (Like one of those drug advertisements on TV, I should say of love that results may vary. Side effects may include nausea, upset stomach, loss of appetite, increase in appetite, profuse sweating, dilated pupils… and on and on.) This picture of love as emotion surely rings true: love is individual, physical, and intense, often overwhelming and sudden, and it feels like it just happens, as if one has slipped, like Alice in Wonderland, down the rabbit hole.

If love *qua* emotion is like this—an intensely personal experience—how can it be a social practice? I would like to call upon two different kinds of argument to make my case that love is both emotion and social practice. The first challenges the theory of emotions that underwrites the above portrait of love. Accordingly, I will argue that emotions are bound up with reason, socially mediated, physically indeterminate, and more willful than we like to think. Emotions are thus deceptive: they seem like they are entirely personal, spontaneous, and non-voluntary, but really they are socially constructed experiences in which we are active participants (or social actors). The second kind of argument pulls in a different direction. Here, I do not try to undermine the popular portrait of love as a-rational, deeply felt, physically conspicuous, and non-voluntary. Instead, I argue that we must try to understand how such beliefs about love function in American society; we must consider the significance of their perpetuation and how they contribute to social organization. In other words, we must think about why Americans, as a society, see love the way we do.

[1] See Troy Jollimore's *Love's Vision* (2011) for discussion of the role of reason and reasons in love.

I shouldn't go any further without saying that I am going to focus on erotic or romantic love—the kind of love that transpires between partners or spouses, girlfriends and boyfriends, the kind that includes sex (or the expectation of sex). As I hope will become clear, ultimately, the fact that we make a sharp distinction between erotic love and other kinds of love is part of our social practice. Specifically, we are invested in ensuring that friendship is not as central to our social organization as erotic affiliation is. We invest heavily in erotic love at the expense of other valuable forms of love. We tend to see erotic love as the defining pursuit of adult life and as central to individual identity, relegating love of community and love of meaningful work to the margins. So long as we see love only as an emotion, and see emotion as a passive and overwhelming experience, we will fail to take responsibility for how society constructs love, and women, in particular, will continue to be disserved by love.

A Different Theory of Emotions

Let's start with feelings. What does it *feel* like to be in love? One perfectly reasonable answer is that it feels good. Well, maybe it does, maybe it doesn't. But what if you are pressed to be more specific, to give a precise accounting of this feeling, love? Perhaps you will say that it is soothing and peaceful, as you imagine or recall the quiet intimacy that follows sex with the beloved. You may be thinking of slow breathing and bodily relaxation. Or you may say that love feels wild, charged with anticipation, as you imagine or recall hours occupied in soul-baring conversation or flirtatious play with a new lover. You may think of a racing heart and a feeling of levity, as if you could lift right up out of your own shoes. Maybe you will think of a time when your mouth felt dry and you were tongue-tied and verbally clumsy, trying to impress your new lover. Maybe you will recall feeling flush with anger or jealousy when your beloved turned her attention elsewhere or perhaps flush with embarrassment as you are revealed to be ignorant in the presence of your lover. Or maybe you'll remember a time when the loss of your beloved left you deadened to stimuli, as if you were wearing a heavy, leaden cloak that blocked your normal sensitivity to the world. The point is that there is no single or necessary feeling that defines being in love, and there is no set of bodily symptoms or physiological changes that is constitutive of love.

Although our bodies are registers of emotion, alerting us to shifts in our emotional lives, these states of feeling are not themselves emotions.[2] Any given bodily sensation or physiological symptom is compatible with more than one emotion. For example, you may be flush with *anger* or with *embarrassment*. Your heart may race with *anxiety* or with *joy*. Your stomach may churn from consuming spoiled seafood or from *grief*. Dry mouth? Could be thirst, or *fear,* or *shyness*. Slow breathing could be *boredom* or *contentment*. Our emotions are not determined by our sensations. But this is not to say that emotions occur without bodily sensation; it is only to say that emotions cannot be reduced to bodily sensations alone. When we attend to our bodily experiences, we learn to give meaning to them and to align them with emotion words.[3] In so doing, we *decide* what they mean for us, and we do this with the interpretive guidance of our parents, friends, and trusted others, as well as under the influence of representations of emotion in popular media and in literature.[4] We learn from others what various emotions feel like. Thus, the physical aspect of our emotional lives—the feelings we suffer or enjoy—are in an important way a product of our sociality.

An example may help. I will not forget the first time my young son described to me a feeling that was new to him on the morning of a much-anticipated performance at his school. He didn't quite feel like eating breakfast and said he had an uncomfortable feeling in his stomach. He thought maybe he was sick and going to vomit. I told him, using the common idiom, that he had "butterflies in his stomach" –an expression that he, at age six, found both charming and curious. I told him he was *excited* about the performance. Understanding the sensation, the feeling, as "excitement" and relating it to delicate and harmless butterflies gave meaning and direction to his experience. Our chosen language participates in shaping our feelings, our emotions: Just think how different it would be if we said that this feeling was "worms in your stomach" or "spiders"! Either one seems just as apt a description as butterflies, but I, for one, would feel decidedly more unsettled by spiders in my stomach! Calling his feeling "excitement" shaped how he thought about the day

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[2] William James argued in an influential essay that the bodily excitation just *is* the emotion (1884). Recent accounts of emotion in neurological terms represent more contemporary attempts to reduce emotion to physiology.

[3] Martha Nussbaum (2004) has emphasized the way in which the upheaval of emotion is simultaneously physical and cognitive and how the agent gives meaning to her experience through her emotional understanding.

[4] Recent studies suggest that reading literary fiction is an aid to emotional understanding. (See for example, Kidd and Castano, 2013; and Oatley, 2012.) I suggest that this is due to the fact that 1) literary fiction is narrative, and emotional understanding is fundamental to narrative; 2) literary fiction is linguistic in form (as opposed to visual media or music, for example) and emotional understanding gains acuity from linguistic expression; 3) literary fiction represents social and cultural values, which are also constitutive of emotions; and 4) specifically *literary* fiction employs sophisticated vocabulary and subtle social and psychological observations that exemplify emotional intelligence.

and about himself. It meant that the school performance was indeed a special event, an occasion that rose above the ordinary; it meant that the occasion was positive and worthwhile, not unwanted or unpleasant; it meant that it would be fun, not scary or dangerous; it meant that he could take pride in his participation and that doing well in the performance mattered to him.[5]

I have found that a large part of my role as parent consists in just this sort of emotional interpretation and structuring. I have to think about my son's experiences, his expectations, what he cares for and about, what he knows and what he does not know, and help him to perceive the contours of his own emotions and to make the right sorts of connections between feelings and emotions. I try to guide him toward good decisions about how to feel. In addressing myself to this parental work, I must make decisions, too, about what things mean, how important they are, and what kinds of emotions are appropriate. For example, I have to determine whether the event really is exciting or is actually nerve-wracking, an occasion for warranted anxiety.[6] In making my own decisions and judgments, I draw upon the evaluative guidance of others, sometimes through direct discussion of my son's situation or concerns, but just as much through the ongoing process of trying to understand my own life and its concerns. A network of meaning-giving activities is engaged to shape the interpretation of my son's sensations and experiences. As I hope the example demonstrates, an extended web of sociality is required for each of us to name our emotions and to define their roles in our lives. Emotions are radically under-determined by feelings or sensations. And they are deeply informed by a process of socialization, whether or not deliberate and thoughtful. Sometimes we are lucky to have the emotional guidance of people with intelligence and goodwill; but sometimes we are shaped passively, through cultural osmosis, as we take in emotional representations from movies, journalism, photographs, and other media.[7]

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[5] If my suggested analysis of "excitement" seems incorrect, that simply highlights the fact that emotions are identified and understood through a social process of definition, application, and revision. What it means to be excited (as opposed to scared, anxious, or apprehensive, for example) and what kinds of occasion count as apt for excitement is open to public contestation, discussion, and refinement. My point is only that to name something "excitement" requires one to enter this field of discussion, to try to sort out what is as at stake here. The same holds true for "love."

[6] It remains open, on my view, to judge that *no* occasion *warrants* anxiety. That is, my view that judgment is involved in determining the appropriateness of emotions is compatible with a limited, quasi-Stoical judgment that some emotions are always unwarranted or that all emotions must be controlled. But I do not think that a severe sort of Stoical denial of the aptness of *all* emotions is consistent with my view because I do not think that social life can be understood without recourse to emotional explanation. Emotions are shorthand for a complex array of socially-constructed beliefs and ideas which provide information that is vital to understanding what is happening in social life, which is most of our lives.

[7] Importantly, these representations have gendered and racialized aspects. For instance, in the United States, anger is represented differently when it is expressed by a woman of color, by a white woman, or by a man. Given my view

I've just been arguing that emotions are not reducible to feelings and that, moreover, feelings are themselves open to interpretation, which shows them to be socially malleable. But I've relied upon a conception of feelings as primarily physical sensations. It might be objected that when we talk about what it "feels like" to be in love (or indeed to have any other feeling), we are referring to something more than just physical sensations. And, the objection continues, it is this more robust understanding of a "feeling" that is intended when one talks about being in love. Love, it is argued, has a particular feel to it, and that feel is more than just bodily. That's why people so often say that if you are in love you'll know it: it has its own, unique and unmistakable feeling. I have been in love, and I feel (--there it is! "I *feel*") the pull of this objection. Nonetheless, I think that examination of the objection actually helps to prove my point. If a feeling is more than just bodily sensation, if love *qua* feeling is more than physiological changes, we must ask, what is this "more"? What "more" is added onto the bodily that then makes the feeling that is constitutive of love?[8] The answer can only be that the feeling refers to some set of ideas, beliefs, and social facts that are particular to love. If I feel myself to be in love, it must be because I have ideas about love, which obtain in my present circumstances. For example, one idea may be that love strikes suddenly, and I see that my feeling has arisen quickly, unexpectedly. Seeing that the conditions for love obtain, I am in a position to interpret my feeling as love. Were my ideas about love different, my interpretation of my feeling might well be different; I might *not* find that I am in love under just these circumstances. So, my ideas contribute to my own sense of what it is that I feel. This explains why, in part, people can sometimes not know that they are in love until someone else points it out to them: they haven't realized that the conditions of love have been met, that the circumstances of love obtain here.

As with ideas, so too, do my beliefs contribute to my own sense of what it is that I feel. Perhaps my idea of being in love is that love is only real when it is established over the long run. If I believe that my feelings about another are untested by time, then I may well find their sudden appearance to be cause of doubt or suspicion; I may interpret my feelings as mere infatuation, or

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that emotions are socially constructed, it is not surprising that there is a connection to the social-construction of gender and race.

[8] The idea that something "more" is "added onto" the bodily is already misleading; emotion is not summative in the way this suggests. It is not as if there is one thing (bodily feeling) that operates independently of the other thing (belief, idea, judgment, evaluation). Both the physical and the cognitive aspects of emotion are already shaped by prior experience, cultural values, social cues and norms, memory, expectation, etc. They exist simultaneously as an unfolding dynamic.

lust, or believe I am in thrall to an especially charismatic person—not that I am in love.[9] Nothing hinges on drawing a sharp distinction between ideas and beliefs. The point is that both are operative in one's identification of feelings.

Both one's ideas about love and one's beliefs about oneself and one's circumstances are embedded in a larger set of social facts that delimit emotional possibilities. One's ideas and beliefs are formed within a social context in which there are established norms for emotional experience and forms of relationship and intimacy. Acting within this social context, our own ideas and beliefs are responsive to those that are already in social circulation. We respond to the social cues of others and form expectations about their behavior and about *their* emotions, which in turn affects our own emotions, which then again seeds the possibilities for the emotional experiences of others. One reason why it can be so easy to find ourselves swept away by an emotion, or locked into it, is that the experience comes to us in iterative loops of social feedback; it gathers momentum through its social definition as others observe interactions, interpret speech acts, evaluate relationships, classify feelings, name emotions, and respond accordingly, in concert with culturally prevalent ideas and norms. The more complicated the emotion, the more room there is for this interpretive and evaluative work, and love is among our more complicated emotions.

I have suggested that both ideas and beliefs may be thought to contribute to our conception of "feelings," but if they do, then feelings are shown to be more complex than they at first seemed. They are partly constituted by social and cognitive structures—and this is just the view of emotions that I am driving at. In fact, the more carefully we look, the harder it is to draw a firm distinction between feelings and emotions. The best we might do is say that feelings are typically a little less complicated than emotions. But I'm not sure even that will do. Remember my son's butterflies: even so simple and common an experience turns out to be shaped by all sorts of ideas, beliefs, and (though I've only gestured at it until now) values.

Some emotions are surely more complex than others, though. To take one case: I have (an admittedly irrational) fear of large spiders. The sight of a large spider typically gives me chills and

[9] I have alluded to two, opposing ideas about romantic love: that it happens suddenly and that it arises slowly over time. These two ideas correspond, roughly, with the difference between cultures in which marriages are voluntary and those in which marriages are arranged. Voluntary marriage relies upon individual choice and allows for spontaneity in love. Arranged marriage fosters the idea that spouses will learn to love each other in time. There is no evidence to suggest that either view is more correct than the other. In American society, many voluntary marriages (but not all) end in divorce when couples decide they no longer love each other, just as in other societies, many arranged marriages (but not all) do result in lasting love.

goosebumps. I freeze in my tracks. I believe the spider is hideous and loathsome, making something like aesthetic and moral judgments about it—but remember, I admitted my fear is irrational! My response is complete avoidance, a common fear response. As intense as this emotional response to a spider is for me, it is not an especially complicated or important emotion. For one thing, it is short-lived: remove the spider, and within minutes, the fear will have evaporated. But more significantly, this fear has a very limited effect on my life and relationships. We should not conclude, on the basis of this example, that *fear* is not a complicated or important emotion in general. Fear of terrorists or Muslims or women's bodies are also fears and they are socially and relationally important (and also irrational). But the importance and complexity of fear as an emotion in these cases is a matter of the emotion's *object*. It is because terrorists, and Muslims, and women's bodies are socially and politically important that fear of them becomes complex and important.

But some emotions have an importance and complexity that is not attributable to the emotion's object, but to its social structure—to the role that the emotion plays in society. Love is like this. Given the broad array of beliefs and ideas that are constitutive of love, love has a complexity that means it is manifest in variable states over time. What love feels like will depend on the circumstances in which the lover finds herself moment to moment or day to day. Recall the possibilities mentioned earlier: in love, you may feel calm, energized, lustful, angry, jealous, aggrieved, embarrassed, or happy—and that's a dramatically incomplete list. Given this variety, it is a mistake to conceive of love as any particular feeling; it may not even be properly counted as a single *emotion* (let alone a single *feeling*). Love is constituted by too many ideas and beliefs, too many values, to be captured by a simple statement or described in parallel to my fear of spiders. The spider is the object of my fear, and my beloved is the object of my love, and both might be described as intense emotions, but what I feel in the latter case is different in kind.

Rejecting the idea that emotions are mere feelings, Robert Solomon describes love as a "process," emphasizing the dynamic nature of the emotion.[10] I'm not convinced that "process" is the right idea here, as it connotes something procedural, organized into steps, or progressing according to an established order. But Solomon is surely right that love is too complex to be

[10] Robert Solomon, *About Love* (1994).

accurately captured in terms of a transient feeling. And he is right to think that love's timeframe typically means that many changes in feeling and emotion are forthcoming.

We might be tempted to say that love is a disposition: a state in which one is disposed to certain sorts of emotional experiences.[11] For example, the lover is disposed to feel sadness when the beloved is hurt, joy when the beloved is happy. The attraction of a dispositional account is that it allows for love's variability over time and emphasizes the way in which emotional experience is contingent upon circumstance. On the downside, a dispositional account of love may not be able to distinguish it from other complex emotional states that might also engender the same responses. For example, I may feel sadness when my friend is hurt and joy when my friend is happy, but, as we all know, friendship is different than erotic love. (However, as I've hinted already, this firm knowledge of the distinction between erotic love and friendship is itself a part of our social practice, serving social functions that I will bring up later.) A dispositionalist view may seem a rather vacuous account: to be in love is to be in a state in which one experiences the emotions of love and behaves as lovers do. That doesn't tell us very much. Another disadvantage to a dispositionalist account is that it puts the emphasis on the individual—the person in love is in a particular mental or behavioral state—rather than on the inter-personal dynamic and the way it is informed by larger social norms and structures. In fact, in order to give substance to a dispositionalist account, we'd have to call upon the social norms and prevalent ideas about love in order to identify which sorts of behavior or emotion the person in love is disposed to.

As far as the complexity of love as an emotion goes, Annette Baier comes closest to the mark, arguing that "love is as much [the] coordination of emotions between lovers, as itself a special emotion."[12] On her view, love "makes us more aware of the emotions of the loved one" and enjoins us to a heightened emotional responsiveness to the beloved. When one's beloved suffers a disappointment, one shares in her let-down; when she achieves a hard-won goal, one shares in her pride and joy. But love is more than sympathetic duplication of feeling, Baier explains. Love does not simply demand that lovers share in the same feelings; it expands the occasions for emotional involvement and the range of emotions that are possible. Baier's point is that love is an "activator" of other emotions in the individual and a "communicator" of emotions

[11] Bedford (1957) fended off simplistic behaviorist accounts of emotion (which align with dispositionalist thinking) and defended the idea that emotions involve judgments of value.
[12] Baier, "Unsafe Loves" (1991), p. 442.

from person to person. For example, love may mean that one partner's thrilling connection to a new friend incites the other partner's jealous rage; that one's grief becomes the other's impatience; that one's despondency fuels the other to defiant cheerfulness. There are no strict formulas here, though some forms of emotional interaction are more common than others, some dynamics more typical than others, which is just what we would expect given the fact that emotional responses are learned according to social norms and cultural values.

The view of emotions I have been presenting has dispelled the idea that emotions are reducible to physical sensations or feelings that simply befall us as individuals. Instead, I have said that, while emotions have a physical component, they are physically underdetermined. I have said that they are socially mediated insofar as the ability to identify particular emotional experiences is both a product of socialization and a matter of social interpretation by self and by others.[13] I have hinted at the kind of willfulness that is possible in our emotional lives, discrediting the idea that we are (or must be) merely passive with respect to our emotions. In deciding how to think about what we feel and what others feel, and in enacting the commensurate behavioral responses that we do, we are active participants in shaping our emotional lives and those of others. We are not completely in control of our emotions no more than we are completely in control of anything else in life. But not being able to control outcomes or effects, nor being able to summon feelings instantaneously, does not amount to a forfeiture of the will.[14] We can and do (we must!) nonetheless exert our wills in the course of shaping our emotional experiences. If these ideas about emotion are credible, then love is far less individual, spontaneous, and accidental than we like to think.

Before saying something about love as a social practice, there is one more idea about emotions that we need to tuck into briefly. In relating the common view of love as an emotion, I said that it is viewed, like perhaps all emotions, as a-rational. There is a long history of philosophers glossing emotions as the "opposite" of reason, as pulling against reason, defiling the

[13] Scheman (1983) argues for the idea that emotion is essentially tied to social dynamics.

[14] The idea that emotions are a-rational because we cannot summon them instantaneously is spurious. We cannot summon instantaneously most of the cognitive achievements centrally associated with reason, but we do not therefore dismiss them as beyond our reach or as a-rational. Instrumental reasoning, drawing inferences, adducing evidence—these are all skills that are learned over time and enacted only with attention and concentration, and often difficulty. The more practiced we are with reasoning, the more seemingly spontaneous becomes the display of one's faculty of reason; likewise, the more practiced one becomes with emotional evaluation and attention, the more seemingly spontaneous will be the display of one's emotional faculty.

purity of reason, or undermining reason's efficacy.[15] Some of the philosophers charged with this oppositional view are wrongly accused; the error often lies more with the interpreter than with the figure himself (--I'm thinking of both Plato and Kant here). I'm not going to undertake to adjudicate these interpretive issues here. I won't rehearse all the reasons people have had for insisting on the dichotomous split between reason and emotion. Instead, I want to point to some of the ways in which emotions are implicated in reason and vice versa. I think I can be both brief and effective. There are just two things I want to say.

I have already gestured at the first point: much of our emotional experience has reason at its core. In the act of feeling, we exercise long-tutored judgments about what to feel and how to interpret our circumstances. For example, we must adduce reasons to determine whether anger is appropriate here, whether an injury truly has been inflicted, whether it was intentional, whether the injury is serious or minor, and much more. Getting emotions off the ground requires the exercise of reason. In my observation, one of the most common responses to the question, "How do you feel about that?" is hesitation, often followed by multiplication. First, we are stopped short, considering just what we do feel. We have to *think* about it. Then we attempt to answer: "I am angry… and disappointed… and worried… and embarrassed." We rarely feel just one thing. In the effort to figure out what we feel, we employ concepts, we think, we make inferences, we make judgments, we evaluate the situation at hand. Of course, we don't always reason *well*, and hence we don't always fare well emotionally. But the having of emotions requires us to perceive the world in certain ways and such perception is framed by capacities centrally associated with the faculty of reason.[16] So it goes with love. The act of falling in love involves one in thinking about the beloved's qualities, about the excitement, novelty, interest, or opportunity he or she brings to one's life, and about one's own desires, aims, outlook, and other relationships. How we think about such things, how we evaluate them, is an experience framed by reason-giving activity.

Second, much of what we reason about in ordinary life has emotion at its core. In understanding our personal relationships as well as the larger social world, our emotions are central navigational instruments. Love, fear, shame, embarrassment, anger, guilt, joy, anxiety, disgust, sadness… these are integral to our understanding of what is happening around us; they provide us

[15] See Lloyd (1984) for a discussion of the opposition of reason and emotion and the parallel construction of the opposition between male and female in Western philosophy. Hall (2005) contends that passion and reason are interconnected, perhaps even "effectively indistinguishable" (p. 15).
[16] See Nussbaum, op. cit.

with information about motivations, behaviors, and the nature of events. But the world does not come to us pre-labeled; we must reason our way to an understanding of which emotions are in play or should be. We deliberate about how to understand our social situations, how to interpret others' behaviors, what to do with our lives, or what to do on a Sunday afternoon. These deliberations involve us in thinking about how we feel and how we ought to feel about what other people say and do, about what we have said and done, about what all that means for the future and for our understanding of the past, which informs our outlook on the future. We believe, as we deliberate, ruminate, and reason, that there are better and worse ways of understanding all of this, more and less appropriate or accurate or precise "takes" to have on the events or the situation, better and worse decisions to be made, and more and less reasonable outlooks to sustain. We are really *reasoning* about how to feel, which emotions to sustain, or foster, or own up to. Our reasoning is not just *about* our emotions, it also *affects* our emotions: it propels us toward certain emotions and away from others. Though many philosophers have said that reason is motivationally inert, I think this is all wrong.[17] Thinking about what we feel, reasoning about emotions, often changes our motivational psychology. I will not go so far as to say that reason and emotion are the same thing, but neither are they opposites. Rather, the picture I recommend sees reason and emotion as interlaced faculties.

It's time to summarize the view I've been defending. Emotions are more than mere feelings to which we are passively subjected. Emotions are constructed through rational processes of perception, judgment, and evaluation. Further, reason is often directly employed in the service of defining emotions, narrating their role in our lives and relationships, and interpreting the nature of social events. Though they feel intensely personal, they are also inherently social: the contours of particular emotions are shaped by cultural norms and expectations; emotional experience arises through dynamic feedback from other people; and which emotions we are susceptible to is a matter of the possibilities delimited by the cultural context we live in.[18] Given these ideas about emotions in general, let us think now about how we as a society view erotic love.

[17] David Hume is usually cited as offering support for the idea that reason is motivationally inert, being incapable of choosing or preferring without the support of passion. See Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*, Book II.
[18] This last point is perhaps best supported by the anthropologist Catherine Lutz (1988), whose work explains how an emotion can be articulated and specified through cultural practices, including linguistic practice.

Love as Contemporary Social Practice

To understand love as a social practice, we have to look at how love functions in society. We have to ask what love *does*, what it effects or accomplishes, how it directs our energies and attention, how it contributes to the organization of society. To see love as a social practice, we do not have to quit thinking about it as an emotion. Instead, we have to learn to see emotions *as* social practices; we have to see how emotions function in our discourses, institutions, associations, politics, and economics. To see love as a social practice is not to say that there was a time before love, but to think of it as an emotion that operates differently in different socio-historical contexts.[19] We have to think about how individual experiences of love are part of larger social designs and how the ideas we have about love as an emotion play into these designs. A thoroughgoing cultural analysis of love as social practice could fill volumes. Here, I will introduce a few features of the contemporary social practice of love in America, centered on marriage. I focus the discussion on marriage because marriage is widely considered to be the destination of erotic love.

Erotic love holds a central place in the lives of most people in our society. Most people aspire to marry, most do, and love is the most-often cited reason for marriage and considered the most important reason for marriage today.[20] The connection between love and marriage represents a sea-change in attitudes when compared to the 18th and 19th centuries, when marriage was sought primarily as a means for women to achieve financial and material security. Laws of coverture forbade their ownership of property or custody of their own children, and access to education and the professions was prohibited or greatly restricted for women.[21] For men, marriage offered access to free and licit sex and to unpaid domestic labor, and the opportunity to create legal heirs to their property. Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, and Margaret Fuller all had to *argue* for the idea,

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[19] The view I am adopting is influenced by Lutz (1988) and by Foucault, who is also a crucial theoretical resource in Lutz's work. Accordingly, the emotion, love, alters with its social context, taking on new meanings, promulgating new norms, and functioning differently as discourses change over time. Thus, love as a social practice has a genealogy. Others have done some of this genealogical work. See for example, Denis De Rougemont (1940) and Simone de Beauvoir (1949).

[20] In the U.S., eighty-eight percent of the general public said that love is a "very important reason to get married." This is a larger percentage than any other reason for marrying, putting love above such considerations as having children (49%), financial stability (28%), and legal rights and benefits (23%). Half of adults aged 18 or older were married in the U.S. in 2016. See Geiger and Livingston (2018).

[21] Stephanie Coontz provides a comprehensive history of changes in marriage in the West in her book *Marriage, A History* (2006).

then considered rather radical, that marriage should be based on love and equality.[22] Importantly, they believed that genuine love required equality, a view still in need of greater specification and defense. If there was love in marriage in the 18th or 19th centuries, it was a happy accident, not an expected outcome let alone a motivating reason.

Today, Americans marry for love—or so they think. Arguably, they really marry for much the same reasons that people did in the 18th and 19th centuries. We are stuck with the legacy of this earlier form of marriage: Women still do more domestic work than men no matter how many hours they work outside the home or what their income[23], making marriage attractive to men who benefit from women's housekeeping, childcare, and eldercare services. Women earn less than men[24] and are still, therefore, in positions of relative dependency on their male partners, especially for child-support, making marriage more-or-less compulsory. Women are still discriminated against in hiring and promotion[25], limiting their opportunities for professional advancement, meaning that marriage provides both an economic bolster for women and a potential source of personal fulfillment, which they are often denied at work. Women have less property and smaller assets to leave to their children and are more likely to live in poverty than men; again, for women there is a clear economic incentive to marry. Today, most Americans still believe that a man's primary responsibility as a husband is providing financial support, and there is abiding cultural ambivalence about women with young children working outside the home. Last but not least, though pornography has replaced prostitution as the primary alternative to marital sex for men, marriage remains the site of free and licit sex. (As with men's use of prostitution in the 19th century, women today generally look the other way, denying the full extent of men's use of pornography and its effects on their sexuality.[26]) In other words, the gender roles of earlier centuries continue to inform our current expectations of married life.

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[22] See Wollstonecraft (1792), Mill (1869), and Fuller (1845).
[23] For some relevant data, see Parker and Wang (2013) and U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, June 27, 2017.
[24] See Graf, et al. (2018)
[25] Studies and data about gender discrimination abound. For some useful information, see Kim Parker and Funk (2017).
[26] Although the numbers vary with various studies of pornography use, the basic picture that emerges is this: a large percentage (possibly a majority) of American men look at pornography; more men use pornography than women, by a significant margin; men look at porn more frequently than women; women underestimate the extent of their husbands' or boyfriends' consumption of pornography; most women who do use pornography use it with a male partner, not alone; men begin looking at pornography very young (average age of first use is 11 years old); and many people look at pornography while at work. For related discussions of porn, see Gail Dines (2010) and Carroll and Willoughby (2017). Evidence, as well as common sense, suggests that men's attitudes and expectations about sex and

Although the laws of coverture have been repealed, their effects linger. As late as the 1980s in the United States, married women needed their husband's agreement (or name) to obtain a credit card, open a bank account, get a loan, and obtain a mortgage or a passport. The impact of such practices on women's material and psychological independence should not be underestimated; they have lasting effects on women's ability to fund their own education or business ventures and to construct lives of their own. In addition, they have significant generational effects on family dynamics. The laws of coverture have not been replaced with laws or social policies that address women's needs. Negative restrictions were removed, but few positive policies were generated to assist women or to redress gender-based inequalities. In the U.S. (unlike many other Western nations) there is no legally-mandated, paid maternity leave or paternity leave; affordable childcare is practically non-existent; we do not have universal healthcare to ensure the welfare of infants and children. Eldercare is a serious problem that falls largely on the shoulders of women, and workplace policies do little to remove obstacles to women's equal participation and advancement. Even the organization of the public-school schedule has shifted very little in response to women's greater participation in the workforce. It is still assumed that one parent, typically the mother (because her job doesn't pay as much or offer as much opportunity for advancement), will be available at 2:30 in the afternoon to look after the children when they return from school.

In sum, the material and structural incentives to marry have remained largely the same as they were the 19th century; but as women gained greater legal equality and economic opportunity, these incentives went underground and were replaced by the simple monolith of love: we marry for love. What used to be mandated by law, now wears the guise of love. Though the law no longer requires it, most American women (about 80%) take their husband's name when they marry.[27] They say they do it for love (or for convenience). Notably, men say they see it as a symbol, even a proof, of a wife's love. But apparently it is a one-way gesture: it is extremely rare for a man to take a woman's name as a symbol or proof of *his* love, or for any other reason. The "convenience" women see in adopting their husband's name is apparently a convenience mostly for him.

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women are influenced by their consumption of porn. Men's consumption of porn while at work has important implications for women at work (see Tara Price 2013). There is not space in this paper to do justice to the various ways in which men's pornography consumption affects erotic love and the social practice of love. However, I speculate that it contributes to the hostility women encounter at work and to the sexual and marital dissatisfaction of spouses.

[27] Miller and Willis, (2015).

Love also functions as the rationale for other aspects of gender division and inequality. Given the social and economic realities, when women "choose" to work part-time instead of full-time, to devote themselves to childcare and eldercare, and to find personal fulfillment in family life, these choices are often represented as an exercise of individual liberty (the bedrock of American political discourse). They are further justified as practical and sensible. However, their being practical is a function of the restricted options available to women under conditions of inequality and inadequate social policies. Women who focus on family may well love what they do and embrace the life they have. The better part of wisdom and personal happiness may reside in just this ability to make the most of what you've got and to learn to love what you have rather than pine for what is not possible. Nevertheless (she persisted)[28], there is a social practice here that is defining our possibilities. And part of this practice goes by the name love. Women may say it is because they love being mothers that they choose to curtail their careers or that it is because they love their families that they choose to devote more of their resources to the security and well-being of their loved ones. In a world that was not structured by gender inequality, the reasons provided by love might be noble and fully justifying. But in our world, the association between love and gender roles is highly suspect. Men's love and devotion to their wives and children is rarely offered as a reason for *them* to choose part-time work, forego a career, or recede from civic engagement in favor of full-time homemaking and caregiving. *Their* love is not perceived as incompatible with a wide array of career choices. In fact, their economic prospects have, historically, benefitted from marriage: American "breadwinner" laws gave men higher wages than women on the assumption that they had wives and children to support. There is no cultural ambivalence (in the United States) about *fathers* working full-time. Love becomes a rationale for a way of organizing social and economic life that works to the economic and political detriment of women. And because gender is absolutely not a zero-sum game, if it works to the detriment of women, it also works to the detriment of men, albeit in different ways. Men suffer from the deprivation of time spent with their children and aging parents, missing out on the personal rewards that often accompany caretaking experiences.

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[28] "Nevertheless, she persisted" was famously uttered by U.S. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell in 2017, referring to Democratic Senator Elizabeth Warren's unwillingness to be silenced while giving a speech critical of the Republican nominee for Attorney General. McConnell's remark was intended to defame Warren, but instead became a feminist slogan, which I happily employ here.

Men and women entering marriage may not be thinking openly about these reasons for getting married, but no matter how much they profess that love is their motive, they are responding to social norms and cultural ideals in which marriage functions in the ways I have described. Arguably, our gender roles are geared primarily toward this end: boys and girls must become men and women, masculine and feminine, so that they can fall in love, marry, and perpetuate patriarchal and capitalist social and economic arrangements. (Let's not overlook the way the patriarchal history of marriage has worked in concert with capitalism: marriage, laws of coverture, and numerous labor laws and social policies, have restricted women's participation in the paid workforce, allowing men to accrue economic and social capital at the expense of women. The economy depends upon a supply of workers, who must be birthed, nourished, and educated before being eligible for work. However, the women who birth and care for children are given paltry economic support and little chance to participate in public policy-making. The more women invest in the labors of love, the less chance they have to accrue capital let alone to participate in civic labor, in the work of making a just polity.)

As Cheshire Calhoun has remarked, marriage is not just one, but "*the* normative ideal for how sexuality, companionship, affection, personal economics, and child rearing should be organized".[29] Everywhere we look, marriage is held up as the ultimate expression of love: real love culminates in marriage. Importantly, this idea was central to the United States Supreme Court ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the 2015 case that established the legal right of same-sex couples to marry.[30] The cultural preeminence of love, modeled on heterosexual marriage, became—somewhat surprisingly—the rallying point for gay and lesbian activists. To be left out of marriage was to be left out of socially-sanctioned love. Clearly, gays and lesbians fell in love and felt love, as an emotion, but without full access to the social practice of love via marriage, their love was believed to be inferior, incomplete, or invisible. Love, as an emotion, is given direction through its participation in the social, economic, and material arrangements of modern marriage. To fall in love is generally taken to be a movement toward marriage; love thus participates in sustaining a particular form of social organization.

[29] Calhoun (2000): 110.
[30] The Court's majority opinion claims marriage is uniquely valuable: "The right to marry is fundamental because it supports a two-person union unlike any other in its importance to the committed individuals." It further links marriage to lofty ideals: "No union is more profound than marriage, for it embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity, devotion, sacrifice, and family." And in case these exalted sentiments were not enough, the opinion closes with the suggestion that unmarried persons are "condemned to live in loneliness." *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015): 13, 28.

Thinking of erotic love as an overwhelming passion that just happens to a person seems to leave individual agency out of the picture. Seeing love as a natural force, rather than a socially-mediated and culturally-defined experience, exempts it from both personal and political scrutiny. Yet a rather astonishing amount of cultural energy goes into propagating our ideas about love: films with action heroes motivated by love or heroines seeking love; romance novels (34% of the overall fiction market[31]); sitcoms; reality TV programs showcasing bachelors or bachelorettes; countless self-help books devoted to helping people become loveable or be receptive to love; tens of thousands of marriage counselors and psychotherapists devoted to sustaining marriage as we know it; politicians and think-tanks invested in perpetually revitalizing the heterosexual, monogamous, nuclear family unit, etc. The cultural scripts are clear that, especially for women, love is *the* defining storyline of one's life.[32]

I've emphasized the fact that erotic love propels lovers into marriage, which is conceived as the natural destination of love, and that this trajectory has important social, political, and economic consequences as it structures family and work. Our acceptance of love as a motivating force blinds us to these consequences. We do not stop to ask why marriage ought to be love's destination or if there are alternative ways of enacting love that might produce more egalitarian and just social arrangements. Erotic love is held far above friendship, community, meaningful citizenship, and, for women, above productive work. One might think the evident failures of erotic love would disillusion us. But, we are in the grip of a romanticized notion of love. Despite the prevalence of divorce, adultery, and domestic violence, not to mention ordinary forms of spousal dissatisfaction, including sexual dissatisfaction, we insist that love walk down the aisle: serial marriage is now the norm. Our romanticized view of love is promoted on the basis of the idea that love, as an emotion, is spontaneous, powerful, natural, a-rational, individual, and beyond our control. Thus, when we fall in love, we feel ourselves to be powerless and the direction forward is inevitable.

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[31] Romance fiction sells primarily to women, who are 82% of the readership. Source: Romance Writers of America (2018).

[32] Shulamith Firestone (1970) argued, rather trenchantly, that love was a distraction for women. As women devoted themselves to finding husbands, marrying, and sustaining families, they used their vital intellectual, creative, and political resources to support men rather than their own initiatives and projects. Simone de Beauvoir, among others, also saw romantic love, under conditions of gender inequality, as an obstacle to women's agency and autonomy. De Beauvoir, op. cit. More recently, Laura Kipnis (2003) has denounced monogamous relationships as stultifying for both men and women.

I do not believe we ought to forsake the experience of erotic love as an emotion. In a culture more and more mediated by technology, structured by large-scale bureaucratic institutions, and built upon the capitalist exploitation of workers, and yet insistent on individualism and liberty, it is no wonder that we seek, in love, a reprieve from the alienation and anonymity we experience on a daily basis. In romantic love, we find the potential for genuine connection, understanding, and ethical engagement, in addition to the exhilarating passion that can lift us out of the mundane frustrations of modern life. Romantic love is often experienced as a kind of balm and consolation—and for good reason. Yet, I think that the more we emphasize the centrality of erotic love (especially the dyadic relationship of spouses), the more we weaken the opportunities for other kinds of loving connection and community. We would need romantic love less if we invested more, as a society, in bonds of loving friendship, loving work, and loving civic engagement.[33] These other forms of love would be especially useful for women in breaking through the barriers of patriarchy; for, the more women's attention is glued to their (male) partners and children, the less they understand the situation of women and the less opportunity they have for creating constructive relationships with other women, which have the potential to change social structures, law, policy, and workplace norms.

I've tried to build, rather quickly, the scaffolding that is needed to see how love has become a modern masquerade for old gender norms and social arrangements, especially linked to marriage. When women make decisions about marriage, childcare, and career in the name of love, they call upon an apparently unassailable motive: love is good, love is personal, love is politically innocent. Seeing love *only* as emotional attachment and not as social practice makes it difficult to understand women's choices as circumscribed by larger political, economic, and institutional policies. Once we see love as a social practice, we can begin to take personal and political action to change the ways in which we love and the expectations we have for love. The question is not whether love is good or bad, but rather how we might best configure love in order to achieve human flourishing and how love can participate in constructing justice. We must reinvent love; I hope we will revolutionize it.

[33] bell hooks (2001) remarks, "Awakening to love can happen only as we let go of our obsession with power and domination. Culturally, all spheres of American life—politics, religion, the workplace, domestic households, intimate relations—should and could have as their foundation a love ethic" (p. 87). Like hooks, I see positive potential for love to reshape social practices.

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'I Don't Want To be a Playa No More': An Exploration of the Denigrating effects of 'Player' as a Stereotype Against African American Polyamorous Men

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Abstract: This paper shows how amatonormativity and its attendant social pressures converge at the intersections of race, gender, romantic relationality, and sexuality to generate peculiar challenges to polyamorous African American men in American society. Contrary to the view maintained in the "slut-vs-stud" phenomenon, I maintain that the label 'player' when applied to polyamorous African American men functions as a pernicious stereotype and has denigrating effects. Specifically, I argue that stereotyping polyamorous African American men as players estranges them from themselves and it constrains their agency by preemptively foreclosing the set of possibilities of what one's sexual or romantic relational identities can be.

Keywords: ethics, love, polyamory, stereotyping, race.

"I don't wanna be a playa no more"

-Big Pun

"In the case of black men, their subordination as a racial minority has more than canceled out their advantages as males in the larger society. Any understanding of their experience will have to come from an analysis of the complex problems they face as blacks and as men."

-Robert Staples

Introduction

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On February 12th, 2014, I prepared to deliver an invited talk at the University of Arkansas on polyamory.[1] I wanted to use my position as a African American polyamorous man (AAPM) to develop a more comprehensive conversation about polyamory and queer identity.[2, 3] Given that its timing was particularly close to Valentine's day—an American holiday that celebrates romantic monogamous dyads—I thought it perfectly appropriate to deliver a talk that would challenge the audience's unquestioned assumptions about romantic love and relationships. However, what I wasn't prepared for was how I'd be denigrated by a now formerly close friend:

> Friend: *Did you decide what you are going to give your talk on tomorrow?*
>
> Me: Yeah, I think I am going forward with the polyamory idea.
>
> Friend: *Why? I can't believe you are really going to give a Valentine's Day talk on polyamory.*
>
> Me: Why not? If the conversation is about romantic love, I think it's important to expand the scope of representation for what that can look like.
>
> Friend: *(Sighs Frustratingly) You really are going to get up there and give people an academic rationale for cheating and being a player—I really am disappointed in you.*
>
> Me: Why?
>
> Friend: *Because this talk is going to be a step back for black people.*

This was perhaps the first, but has certainly not been the last, time that my identification as a cisgender, heterosexual, African American, polyamorous man has been targeted and attacked for deviating from the social script for romantic love in America. My aim in this paper is to

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[1] Justin Clardy, "On Polyamory Part 1", filmed February 13th 2013 at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR, video, 18:21, www.youtube.com/watch?v=uj9-YxGAe84; Justin Clardy, "On Polyamory Part 2", filmed February 13th 2013 at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR, video, 18:41, www.youtube.com/watch?v=RlTMoFZP0fY&t=2s.

[2] Melita J. Noël, "Progressive Polyamory: Considering Issues of Diversity," *Sexualities* 9, no.5 (2006): 602-620.

[3] It is important to qualify my further usage of the acronym AAPM. My perspective extends from my position as an African American cisgendered heterosexual man. As such, I will be using the term to make reference to the constellation of these identifying markers. This might seem to minimize, erase, or otherwise fail to represent the experiences of polyamorous African American men whose sexual identities are located at different points of the sexual spectrum such as African American polyamorous men who are bisexual, gay, pansexual, or asexual. My reader should keep in mind, however, that part of the methodology employed this work is autobiographical. As a result, my examination of polyqueer sexualities is not exhaustive. Given the many forms that polyamorous relationships can and do take, it needn't be. Instead, I maintain that my experiences are theoretically useful for exploring the connections between amatonormativity and heteromasculinity in producing gender and racial hierarchies.

illustrate how the label 'player' has harmful and denigrating effects when applied to AAPM simply because of their polyamorous lifestyles. I argue that, amidst other harms, this label functions as a stereotype and enacts a range of moral harms including the denigrating effects of estranging AAPM from themselves, and constrains their freedom.

Some feminists believe that there is an asymmetry in sanctioning non-monogamous or promiscuous behavior between men and women. I endeavor to show, however, that in amatonormative societies, sometimes AAPM have peculiar challenges generated at the intersections of their racial, romantic, and sexual identities. Amatonormativity is the default assumption that monogamous, romantic (and usually heterosexual) relationships (that lead to marriage) are the ideal form of romantic relationships and a universal goal.[4] For example, in my own experiences as an AAPM, I have often been labeled a 'player' when I disclose my polyamorous identity. In African American culture, the label 'player' typically denotes something problematic about men's romantic and sometimes sexual identities—namely, that the subject is a "womanizer", "cheater", or otherwise unethically non-monogamous. In this paper, I endeavor to show how amatonormativity and its attendant social pressures generate peculiar challenges to AAPM in American society.

Before beginning, I would like to make a few clarifications. In this paper, I understand polyamory as participation in extradyadic romantic relationships with mutual consent among those involved. Further, I understand polyamorous people as those who practice negotiating desires for consensual extradyadic romantic relationships.[5] The slight differences in my definitions of polyamory and polyamorous, respectively, are intended to capture the fact that someone can be polyamorous without presently participating in an extradyadic romantic relationship. Although I confine myself to talking about a stereotype regarding AAPM, I do not mean to imply that polys who are not AAPM are immune. There are likely stereotypes about polys from various racial and ethnic groups and indeed especially damaging ones that deserve more of an extensive treatment

[4] Elizabeth Brake, *Minimizing Marriage: Marriage, Morality, and the Law* (New York: Oxford UP, 2012), 88.

[5] Here I emphasize the "practice of negotiating" desires rather than merely having the desires for or interest in consensual extradyadic romantic relationships. The reason for this is that some people experience these desires as unworthy of being endorsed or negotiated, but rather repudiated — perhaps in the service of fulfilling their commitment to a monogamous romantic relationship, or what they might take to be their own monogamous identity. In cases like these, I do not believe that the people in question are polyamorous even if they find themselves with what might, on the surface, show up as polyamorous desires. While I do not have the space to sufficiently engage this issue here, I would like to thank Liam Kofi Bright for pushing me to clarify this point.

that I can provide here. I must also stipulate that my understanding of stereotypes takes after Lawrence Blum's definition where "stereotypes are false or misleading associations between a group and an attribute that are held in a rigid manner, resistant to counterevidence."[6] For Blum, stereotypes are a form of morally defective regard for persons as they necessarily fail to recognize the internal diversity of groups. On his account, stereotypes also fail to acknowledge stereotyped individuals' identities by maintaining false or misleading associations between the individual and some group to which they are believed to belong. Insofar as I too believe stereotypes are based on false or misleading associations of this kind, I believe that these harms are present in the case of stereotyping AAPM. But my account builds on Blum's account by drawing on Lauren Freeman's analysis of embodied harms that stereotypes perpetuate. As such, I illustrate harms to AAPM that are outside of Blum's scope.

The intersecting factors my account covers highlights some of the ways that various social groups are disproportionately denigrated for their polyamorous lifestyles in amatonormative societies, thereby extending the work of queer, feminist, and critical race scholars on connections between normativity, power, and privilege.

Amatonormativity

Feminist philosophers Elizabeth Brake and Carrie Jenkins have remarked on both the pervasiveness of amatonormativity and the attendant harms that people and groups who are excluded by it face—such as friends, singles, and polyamorists. In America, because amatonormativity is the dominant assumption about legitimate romantic relationships, it functions as the default backdrop against which all other romantic relationships must compare. As a result, romantic relationships that deviate from the default social script for romantic relationships are socially stigmatized and their participants come to be seen as problematic 'others' in discussions

[6] Lawrence Blum, "Stereotypes and Stereotyping: A Moral Analysis," *Philosophical Papers* 33, no.3 (2004), 288. In his forthcoming chapter "What is Sex Stereotyping and What Could Be Wrong With It?" that will appear in the *Bloomsbury Companion to Analytic Feminism*, Adam Omar Hosein urges that we should be pluralists about stereotyping in order to capture all of the relevant moral and political harms. I agree with Hosein and am, in general, a pluralist about stereotypes. However, in this paper I rely on Blum's characterization because of the way it speaks to the normative dimensions of stereotypes and stereotyping in particular; while some accounts of stereotypes include non-defective associations, on Blum's account, for something to count as a stereotype is for it to be defective in some way—either moral or epistemic.

about romantic love—for example, polyamorists have their relationships treated as second-rate and cannot have marriage arrangements that match their romantic arrangements.

In America, amatonormativity is prevalent and works to unduly privilege some individuals over others. Speaking both from and about the American context, Brake says that "amatonormative discrimination is widely practiced".[7] On the same note, Jenkins (who is polyamorous herself) writes that "amatonormativity is so pervasive as to be more or less invisible except to the people it most directly affects."[8] Like most forms of social privilege, the overwhelming presence of amatonormativity renders it virtually imperceptible to those who subscribe and benefit from it. For those who are adversely impacted by it, its existence is hard to ignore. According to Brake, when we discriminate based on false judgments that rest on amatonormative assumptions, we commit a moral wrong as doing so "wrongly privileges the central, dyadic, exclusive, enduring amorous relationship associated with, but not limited to, marriage."[9] Following these philosophers, below I review some of the privileges and costs that are associated with amatonormativity, in an effort to fine-tune our understanding of what it is and how it works in American society on a general level.

As Brake says, amatonormative relationships are dyadic, romantic, enduring, and of central importance to one's life. They are sometimes associated with a desire for marriage but they need not be. For example, outside of marriage, monogamous romantic relationships are socially recognized with legitimacy in a way that non-monogamous romantic relationships are not. Brake states that "couples who maintain an enduring amorous relationship but refrain from sex, maintain separate domiciles, or keep their property disentangled, can still be recognized as amorous partners."[10] Importantly, the extent to which people can receive amatonormative privileges hinges on social recognition—in particular, a recognition of one's romantic relationship by others as legitimate. As sex, living arrangements, and property entanglement can all be thought to belong to the private dimension of romantic relationships, there is a sense in which couples can still present themselves and be socially recognized as romantic partners so long as their relationship is seemingly loving, enduring, and central to the lives of its participants. Brake notes that these three conditions are jointly sufficient for receiving the benefits of amatonormativity, while none of them

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[7] Elizabeth Brake, *Minimizing Marriage: Marriage, Morality, and the Law* (New York: Oxford UP, 2012), 88-9.
[8] Carrie Jenkins, *What Love is and What it Could be* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 142.
[9] Brake, *Minimizing Marriage*, 90.
[10] Ibid.

are independently sufficient for it. For example, "a brief, amorous summer fling or extramarital affair would not be privileged, and friendships may be central and enduring but not privileged."[11] Again, what shows up as important is the extent to which the privilege of amatonormativity hinges on having one's romantic relationship recognized by others.

Amatonormative relationships are unduly privileged over other forms of caring and loving relationships such as polyamorous relationships and friendships. "Friendships and adult care networks", Brake writes, "are not accorded the social importance of marriages or marriage-like relationships", despite being (at least) as central, loving, and caring as the relationships that amatonormativity privileges.[12] The distinction that Brake includes between friendships and other kinds of adult care networks is telling. One might think that amatonormative discrimination is fair against friendships because they are not sexual, yet clearly it's not the presence of a sexual dimension that is the matter since it also discriminates against polyamorous relationships which may be sexual.[13][14] In failing to be extended the same social importance of amatonormative relationships, poly relationships "lack the recognition received by monogamous relationships, and participants, judged to be immoral simply for their nonconforming relationships, face discrimination."[15] In America, this discrimination is political and social.

Marriage law sustains amatonormativity as it functions compulsorily because dyadic relationships are socially, politically, and economically incentivized through marriage. Socially, amatonormativity is sustained through the propagation of representations of romantic love as being between two people. For example, all of the films on a list published in 2013 by BET (Black Entertainment Television) claiming to list the "Top 25 Black Love films" are about heterosexual dyads.[16] A 2018 list published by Blavity.com, a digital media outlet that aims to "economically

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[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] I owe thanks to the issue's editor, Daniela Cutas, for helping me clarify this point.
[14] As the topic of my paper is polyamory, I restrict my comments in the main body for this purpose. However, I would like to point out that rendering friendships unimportant on the basis that they are not romantic or sexual relationships is perhaps the most blunt and blatant display of amatonormativity one could offer as friendships can be and often are meaningful, important and loving relationships without romantic feelings or sex. Without reflection, this objection dismisses this possibility out of hand in the service of unconsciously promoting amatonormativity. Ultimately, this amounts to an argument for the importance of amatonormative relationships on the basis that friendship is not an amatonormative relationship.
[15] Ibid. More on this in the coming section.
[16] "Top 25 Best Black Love Films," BET, accessed May 15, 2018, www.bet.com/shows/bet-star-cinema/photos/2013/10/top-25-best-black-love-films.html.

and creatively support Black millennials across the African Diaspora," that claims to catalog "14 of the Greatest Black Love Movies of All Time" similarly only represents heterosexual dyads.[17] On Twitter and Instagram, the hashtags #BlackLove and #Relationshipgoals remind us that social media is not exempt from this charge either as each of the tags are largely populated by images and narratives of romantic dyads as the ideal towards which we all should strive. These media representations become controlling images of how African American heteromasculinity is defined. In so doing, they also define what forms of African American heteromasculinity are marginal.[18]

Many forms of legal discrimination are attached to the institution of marriage which, in its present state, only exists to protect dyads. The protections that dyads are afforded through marriage come at a cost to polys. These costs cover a wide range from discriminatory housing policies to legally imposed penalties for adultery, and they work to perpetuate systemic disadvantages for people who are polyamorous.[19] In America, "cheating" in a marriage is punishable by fine or jail time in 21 states.[20] Polys also have their economic opportunities squandered as "married or formerly married persons qualify for U.S. Social Security payments based on their spouse's employment [and] married workers receive significantly benefits packages when these include spousal health insurance at a reduced rate".[21]

Another aspect of the discrimination that polys face is social. It includes stereotyping and evaluative judgments regarding their relationships. Because poly relationships are not treated as socially significant in the way that amatonormative relationships are, they are often "not seen as providing good social reasons" for recognizing their relationships as legitimate.[22] Jenkins speaks to these judgments from her own experiences when she says, "for us, the stigma and social rejection that surround nonmonogamy carry costs that are hard to count. My boyfriend's father refuses to talk to him about anything except the weather until he breaks up with me. We've been together for years, and I've never met any of his family."[23] Jenkins talks about the psychological

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[17] Valerie Robinson, "14 of the Greatest Black Love Movies of All Time," Blavity, accessed May 15, 2018, https://blavity.com/14-of-the-greatest-black-love-movies-of-all-time.
[18] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 161-66.
[19] Brake, *Minimizing Marriage*, 94.
[20] Joli Lee, "In Which States is Cheating on Your Spouse Illegal?", Detroit Free Press, accessed May 15, 2018, www.freep.com/story/life/family/2014/04/17/in-which-states-is-cheating-on-your-spouse-illegal/28936155.
[21] Brake, *Minimizing Marriage*, 94.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Carrie Jenkins, *What Love is,* 134.

costs as well. She says "it is impossible to avoid the psychological impact of amatonormativity—the idea that if you're not in romantic love, or at least looking for it, then you're doing life wrong. While I don't agree with that on an intellectual level, the internalized attitude is hard to dislodge."[24]

In my own experiences, I have been labeled as being immature, having commitment issues, or as being promiscuous, on the basis of my polyamorous identity. Furthermore, family members and friends have failed to recognize the significance of breaking-up with partners by refusing to accept these events as reasons for sadness or grief in the way that they have for my amatonormative counterparts. Instead of empathizing with the experience of love loss, I have been normatively instructed that I "should not feel bad" because I (may) have other partners to "fall back" on. The reader can take away a few things from this particular attitude. First, for some lovers, to love is to exist in a relationship of shared experiences of a certain quality with their partner(s), which fosters intimacy. Because love requires openness and vulnerability, any time we love we open up to the possibility of experiencing the agonizing grief of losing our beloveds whether through death or the termination of a relationship. The belief that polys should be impervious to this experience of grief because they have multiple romantic relationships is at the very least insensitive[25]; even more, the insensitivity expresses an impossible imperative by reducing the humanity of people who are polyamorous while simultaneously summoning us to be so much more than human. Notice also that I am not the only person affected by this: the assumption that another partner can or even wants to conduct emotional labor on a former partner's behalf reduces their agency by treating them as fungible objects whose function is to be nothing other than a partner in this capacity.

Pertaining to the stereotypes that are imposed on people who are perceived to be non-monogamous, Jenkins talks about the ways that women who violate "the norm of romantic monogamy are commonly policed via the mechanism of slut shaming".[26] She goes on to introduce a perceived asymmetry between the penalties imposed on women against those imposed on men for violations of the romantic norm of monogamy. She writes that:

> *[slut shaming] carries a higher penalty for women than for men, I call this the "slut-versus-stud phenomenon." It's not hard to come up with a long and colorful list of words that*

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[24] Carrie Jenkins, *What Love is*, 103.

[25] I would like to note that it is plausible that some people may feel this way when parents lose one or two or more siblings, yet it I am highly doubtful that they would go as far as to say this out loud. I am grateful for comments from Daniela Cutas, the editor, that helped me see this point.

[26] Jenkins, *What Love is*, 138.

> *specifically denigrate promiscuous women. But what words denigrate promiscuous men? A "rake" or "cad" sounds like the dashing antihero in a P.G. Wodehouse story. A "playboy"* ***or "player" sounds like somebody who has a lot of fun****. A "pimp" is a man who controls or manages sex workers, not someone who is himself promiscuous. I have never heard anyone use the word "gigolo" in real life. "Man-whore" is explicitly a masculinized version of a feminine word. "Womanizer" might be the best candidate, but while derogatory it lacks the vitriolic punch of "slut" (partly because it points to an activity rather than an identity). And I don't know of any words generally used to praise promiscuous women in a manner comparable to the way "stud" is used for men.*[27]

What Jenkins calls the "slut-versus-stud phenomenon" suggests that there is no word that denigrates the non-monogamous behavior of men. In the next section, I focus on one, 'player', that has a different social meaning when interpreted in a different linguistic community. Looking at African American English (AAE),[28] we can access the social meaning of player from a vantage point within the African American community—a vantage point outside of the scope of this slut-versus-stud phenomenon as Jenkins describes it. On my view, the word "player" actually does function to denigrate AAPM for violations of the norm of romantic monogamy. Focusing on how the word 'player' functions amongst African American speakers raises larger questions about whether there are more stereotypes that are peculiarly generated at the intersection of racial, romantic relational, gendered, and sexual identity.

I don't Want to be a Playa No More

Both Mimi Schippers and Pepper Mint talk about the tenuous relationship between cheating and monogamy. In America, cheating can plausibly be understood as a transgression against an expectation for exclusivity across some dimension of one's romantic relationship (usually sexual or romantic). For Mint, "monogamy needs cheating in a fundamental way. In addition to serving as the demonized opposite of monogamy, the mark of the cheater is used as a threat to push individuals to conform to monogamous behavior and monogamous appearances."[29] As photo negatives function on photographic paper, cheating narratives—morally unacceptable

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[27] Ibid, 139. Emphasis added.

[28] See H. Samy Alim and Geneva Smitherman, *Articulate While Black: Barack Obama, Language, and Race in the U.S.* (New York: Oxford UP, 2012); Geneva Smitherman, *Talkin and Testifying: The Language of Black America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin); Lisa J. Green, *African American English: A Linguistic Introduction* (United Kingdom: Cambridge, 2002).

[29] Pepper Mint, "The Power Dynamics of Cheating," *Journal of Bisexuality* 4, no. 3-4: 59-60.

portrayals of one partner having an extrarelational affair (sexual or otherwise) without the knowledge or consent of the other partner—serve as the negative image against which the positive image is cast. They affix cheaters as characters in a "morality play" where the cheater "plays the common cultural part of the demonized other, a yardstick that normal people can measure their morals against."[30] For Schippers, these narratives perpetuate hegemonic power as those who deviate from the socially accepted structures of romantic relationships "are collectively and publicly punished, [and] others are discouraged from engaging in the behavior."[31] Cheating narratives, then, become important mechanisms for sustaining amatonormativity, leaving monogamy as the unscathed hegemonic norm.[32]

In AAE the term 'player' typically denotes something problematic about men's romantic and sometimes sexual identities.[33] The prevalence of its usage in African American culture has been documented by dictionaries of AAE. For example, in *African American Slang: A Linguistic Description,* Maciej Widawski lists two variations of the word, 'playa' and 'player' and defines them as "a womanizer who takes advantage of women".[34] Contrary to what the slut-vs-stud phenomenon would lead us to believe, 'player' is an identity made through 'womanizing'.[35] Before moving on, however, I would like to point out that connotations associated with the word's usage in AAE are also recorded on *Urban Dictionary*, an internet crowdsource tool for gathering social meaning which allows readers to post their own entries and vote on existing ones. It lists 49 definitions ranging from 'cheaters' to 'rapists'.[36] The 3rd ranked entry for 'playa' (which is the 1st entry for the word that addresses romantic relationships), has more than 1500 "thumbs up" votes and it reads:

> *a male who uses women for sex or other favors usually by charming the girl till they fall in love with them. A lot of guys do this in order to be a "playa" because in our modern society*

[30] Ibid, p. 58-9.
[31] Mimi Schippers, *Beyond Monogamy: Polyamory and the Future of Polyqueer Sexualities*, (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 43.
[32] Ibid, 42.
[33] The reason that I say sometimes sexual is because it is important to note that sex is not essential to romance. Some people no longer have sex with their partners; others never had sex with their romantic partners to begin with, as is sometimes the case with people who are as asexual.
[34] Maciej Widawski, *African American Slang: A Linguistic Description* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015), 238.
[35]My analysis focuses on Widawski's definition because in linguistic work on AAE, Widawski's work is fundamental. See Sharese King, "African American slang: A Linguistic Description", *Language* 92, no. 2, June 2016, 480.
[36] "Playa," Urban Dictionary, accessed May 15, 2018, https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=playa.

> *it is (by idiotic dickheads) "cool" and "hip" to be labeled as a "playa". A female version of this would be a slut.*[37]

Being labeled a player is also associated with being a "love offender", "scandalous", "impulsively flirtatious", self-interestedly "manipulative", as "having multiple illegitimate children", as "having multiple romantic partners", as "having sex with many people", "promiscuous", "ladies man", "playboy", "flirtatious", and a "dog".[38] The social meaning of "player," is thus negatively valenced as a 'womanizing man' and is relatively widespread.

In patriarchal societies, being a player carries positive evaluative judgments as well. For example, some men might very well want to be a 'player' as some people find being a player "cool" (as the author of the quote mentions). Here we find a complexity that we do not find with the term slut. This observation provides a unique opportunity to parse out how amatonormativity, patriarchy, and heteronormativity converge to create the conditions for such an aspiration.

Heteronormativity and amatonormativity bolster the thought that the appropriate relationship between men and women is dyadic, romantically and sexually exclusive—one man to one woman. Deviance thus becomes characterized by violating these norms and as a result, there is a felt need to conceal violations when they occur. Furthermore, patriarchies are socially organized to favor men and wield power over women. As Jenkins points out, in relation to non-monogamy and promiscuity (and not to conflate the two), when women violate these norms, they are sanctioned by negative moral attitudes (i.e. "slut"). However, patriarchy enables men to remain unsanctioned for what women are sanctioned for. This asymmetry is reflected in how 'player' situates men in relation to women. The power distinction is between "the player" and "the played" (where a man is the "player" and a woman is the "played"). This language suggests competition where men are the ones who get to compete in "the game" and women are merely "played with"—which also has disrespectful connotations of manipulating many women. Men, then, are gratified by playing it "successfully"—deceiving and manipulating women without being found out—and flaunting this male privilege.[39]

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[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] I am indebted to the comments from an anonymous reviewer for suggesting that I explicitly engage this point.

Aside from aspiring to be one, some people do engage in practices rightly associated with the label 'player'. That is, non-monogamous practice or extradyadic involvement can sometimes be inappropriate. For people who subscribe to amatonormative norms and are in monogamous romantic relationships, there is a widespread expectation for exclusivity across different dimensions of one's relationship (usually sexual and emotional). Expectations for exclusivity come about in different ways. Sometimes people considering a romantic relationship with one another explicitly co-create the boundaries for the relationship through conversation. Far more commonly, however, these boundaries are not discussed and, by default, we rely on our society's dating norms to "fill in the blanks".[40] To transgress against a mutually recognized expectation for exclusivity in one's romantic relationship is to cheat—to engage in non-monogamous practice or otherwise extradyadic involvement in a non-consensual way. However, it is precisely the garnering of this consent that is paramount to polyamory.

Widawski's glossary provides the following examples in order to contextualize the word:

- "*I'm a bad man, I'm a player.*"
- "*Lamar is such a playa, I seen him with Nikki last night but I know he's still with Amber, Latasha thinks she's his girl. He's playin' them all.*"
- "*Do you continue with a guy knowing he's a player?*"[41]

Notice first that the examples that Widawski provides to contextualize the term are at once gendered, amatonormative, and heteronormative. In each of the examples, the person being referred to is a man. Although in practice people of any gender can be a player,[42] the term and the images typically used to represent it are commonly gendered and usually refer to heterosexual men. Keeping with the gendered association, in a section on controlling images of black masculinity, Patricia Hill Collins remarks that players often target and prey upon women by trading sexuality for other kinds of self-interested benefits.[43] When I have disclosed my polyamorous identity to friends, potential partners, and strangers alike, I have often been met with a range of the denigrating associations listed on the *Urban Dictionary*, yet the most common of these has been

[40] I am grateful for my colleague Zach Biondi for pushing me to see this point.
[41] Widawski, *African American Slang*, 238.
[42] Geneva Smitherman, *African-American English: From the Hood to the Amen Corner* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 232.
[43] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 162.

'player'. The point, then, is that for African American men the label 'player' is commonly used as a means of disapproval and policing of their sexual and romantic lives. Its main use functions as the enforcement of sexual and romantic norms by way of branding non-monogamous African American men in ways that, in an amatonormative society, make them (among many other things) less desirable romantic partners (as is evidenced in the third example).

In the first example, we learn that the word sometimes carries evaluative judgments about a man's character. That is, in some cases the label of 'player' comes with attendant moral judgments that one is a 'bad' person. Although the first example does not explicitly refer to romantic relationships, the label carries negative moral judgments when referring to African American men's sexual or romantic lifestyles as well. The truth is, amatonormative assumptions shape and constrain what we take the central features of romantic love to be. As such, the assumptions serve a discriminatory function in discussions about romantic love, artificially distinguishing "legitimate" romantic relationships from "illegitimate" ones. If you are not going about looking for love in a (serial) monogamous way that leads to marriage (and in some cases procreation), then you are not "doing it right".[44] Non-monogamous practice becomes wrong, its practitioners "bad". These normative undertones of amatonormativity, then, uphold the belief that non-monogamy is unethical, mistakenly rendering consensually non-monogamous romantic relationships illegitimate, unethical and second-class. Through labeling others as players, "cheating is positioned as the inferior and immoral opposite of monogamy, as if the binary monogamy/cheating were the mutually exclusive and exhaustive range of sexual behavior."[45]

Whatever else cheating may involve, this form of betrayal often involves dishonesty and concealment. Both the dishonesty and concealment associated with cheating are tethered to amatonormativity in ways that give rise to the association of "playa" as "a womanizer who takes advantage of women."[46] In a society where amatonormative relationships are valued, prioritized, and legally protected (via the institution of marriage), there are overwhelming social and political incentives to present as conforming to the amatonormative script. This can create (sometimes insurmountable) social pressure for people to perform and present their love lives amatonormatively by any means necessary. Communicating non-monogamous desires, then,

[44] Jenkins, *What Love is*, 38.
[45] Mimi Schippers, *Beyond Monogamy*, 43.
[46] Widawski, *African American Slang*, 238.

presents a grave risk of loss—of a relationship, a lover, or potential romantic partner—for people who subscribe to amatonormative norms and are in monogamous romantic relationships. As a result, these pressures frequently take the form of manipulation and lying; especially lying about non-monogamous desires and practices. This is what prompts Deborah Anapol to write that "lies, deceit, guilt, unilateral decisions and broken commitments are so commonplace in classic American-style monogamy that responsible monogamy may sound like an oxymoron."[47] Ultimately, players womanize by manipulating the field of play—the romantic game, if I may call it that—by lying and concealing their non-monogamous desires and practices in order to satisfy both their desires for a continuous romantic relationship with their partner and their non-monogamous desires. In other words, so that they may have their "cake and eat it too."

This womanization is alleged in Widawski's second example. It would be uncontroversial to assume that the second example is expressed within a context of romantic relationships. As such, it is this example that is most pertinent. In the second example, the speaker's third-person perspective reinforces the sense that romantic love is important in our society. Even though Lamar is not present, the speaker concerns themselves with Lamar's love life thus demonstrating a societal concern about matters of romantic love even when they are not our own matters—we are obsessed with love affairs and *love affairs*. In this case, Lamar is labeled a 'playa' because he is presumed to have more than one romantic relationship—a violation of the norm of romantic monogamy. The speaker implies that, to their knowledge, Lamar and Amber are in a mutually recognized monogamous romantic relationship with one another.[48] Further, the speaker implies that something about Lamar's extradyadic involvement with Latasha has led Latasha to believe that she and Lamar are in a mutually recognized romantic relationship with one another. I would like to point out that the alleged normative weight associated with the label playa is present here; in identifying Lamar as a playa, the speaker is transmitting socially significant information—the belief that Lamar is a dishonest man. The speaker's explanation makes reference to what they

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[47] Deborah Anapol, *Polyamory: The New Love Without Limits: Secrets of Sustainable Intimate Relationships* (San Rafel: IntiNet Resource Center, 1997), 3.

[48] The language of 'mutual recognition' employed here is meant to index the extent to which in attitude-dependent relationships the parties adopt shared attitudes about the mode of relationship they have with one another. For a thorough discussion of attitude-dependent relationships, see Niko Kolodny, "Love as Valuing a Relationship," *The Philosophical Review* 112, no. 2 (April, 2003): 135-189.

believe to be inappropriate extradyadic involvement between Lamar and Nikki, in addition to Lamar and Latasha.

Notice that dishonesty plays a central role for players. That is, Lamar's extradyadic involvement with Latasha and with Nikki is inappropriate because it is involvement that he is keeping from Amber.[49] As a consequence, Lamar is taken to be deceiving Amber about how he and Latasha and how he and Nikki relate to one another. I maintain, however, because 'player' connotes dishonesty, it is simply incorrect and misleading to apply it to polys.

Inappropriate extradyadic involvement is what animates the 'womanizing' part of the definition. The assumption that Lamar is in a relationship with Amber amounts to amatonormative assumptions about its structure—namely, that it is an exclusive, dyadic, romantic relationship—and that Lamar is violating the norm of romantic monogamy across one or more dimensions (i.e. sexual, emotional, etc.). In Lamar's case, apparently the violation partly consists in being seen in public spaces with a woman irrespective of whether the woman is or is not a romantic partner of his. Working in the background, amatonormativity functions to sustain a default assumption that something morally problematic is going on with Nikki. Notice that this assumption needn't be true; men and women meet-up with one another for a variety of reasons including friendship maintenance, business relationships, etc. Despite men being the primary targets of the derogatory term, the totality of denigrating effects borne by being labeled a player is not solely borne by them. For example, when the speaker states that "*he's playin' them all*", we learn that the definition has bidirectional stigmatic impact as the women who get categorized as the 'played' or the 'womanized' are presented as having no agency: Amber is not afforded consideration of possibly having consented to a non-monogamous relationship.[50] Agency is male and the woman is defined relative to him, à la Simone De Beauvoir.[51]

In labeling AAPM players, womanization of this sort is erroneously applied. When organizing and explaining the contours of polyamorous relationships, scholars of polyamory

[49] Since I realize that some might maintain that lies are carried out by speech acts and ignore "lies by omission", I should be explicit about my assumption that concealment counts as lying.

[50] In conversations with black polyamorous women it has been brought to my attention that having their agency stripped in this way is further denigrating as they also are stigmatized as dumb, having low self-esteem or as being controlled (another way of saying without agency). As a result, the stigma of player also works to disincentivize black women from engaging in non-monogamous relationships.

[51] Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovny-Chevallier (New York: Vintage Books, 2011).

regularly invoke honesty and enthusiastic informed consent based on full disclosure as foundational principles of poly theory and practice.[52] In the words of Elizabeth Emens, "for many polys, honesty is so central to polyamory that they would object to the use of the term polyamory independent of honesty, protesting that honesty is a definitional element of polyamory."[53] Polyamorists, myself included, "privilege honesty as the foundation of positive [polyamorous] relationships."[54] Further, because the default norm is one of monogamy in America, polys must emphasize honest communication about their poly lifestyles. Given that dishonesty is a hallmark of being a 'player', AAPM are thus, not players.

The prioritization of honesty in poly relationships form a basis for consensual non-monogamy.[55] Emens remarks that "the ideal of consent—that partners in a relationship or sexual encounter make an informed decision to participate in the relationship or encounter, including knowing its polyamorous context – pervades poly writing, both implicitly and explicitly."[56] A caveat, however, is that "though individual poly relationships may not always embody true consent, this ideal is a vital part of the relationship models to which polys aspire."[57] Still, the poly emphasis on consent enables a more robust sense of agency as it enhances the freedom to choose for one's self the relationship norms one would like to be governed by and it prioritizes individual rather than social expectations for romantic love.[58] More importantly, the culture of disclosure and

[52] See Elizabeth F. Emens, "Monogamy's Law: Compulsory Monogamy and Polyamorous Existence," *New York University Review of Law and Social Change* 29, (2004): 277-376; Luke Brunning, "The Distinctiveness of Polyamory," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 33, no. 4, (2016): 1-19; Jenkins, *What Love is and What it Could Be*; Justin Clardy, "The Dissolution of Cheating: Kevin's Heart," accessed May 18, 2018, www.urfavfilosopher.me/single-post/2018/04/25/The-Dissolution-of-Cheating-Kevins-Heart; Justin Clardy, "Insecure… About Open Relationships," accessed May 18, 2018, www.urfavfilosopher.me/single-post/2017/08/15/Insecure-About-Open-Relationships; Justin Clardy, "Marriage and Commitment," accessed May 18, 2018, https://ethnografis.com/2014/09/01/justin-clardy-marriage-and-commitment/; Deborah Anapol, *Polyamory: The New Love*; Dossie Easton and Janet W. Hardy, *The Ethical Slut: A Practical Guide to Polyamory, Open Relationships, and Other Adventures*, (New York: Random House, 2011); Ann Tweedy, "Polyamory as Sexual Orientation," *University of Cincinnati Law Review* 79, no. 4, (2011): 1461-1515; Jin Haritaworn, Chin-ju Lin, and Christian Klesse, "Poly/logue: A Critical Introduction to Polyamory, *Sexualities* 9, no. 5 (2006): 515-29; Elisabeth Sheff and Corie Hammers, "The Privilege of perversities: race, class, and education among polyamorists and kinksters," *Pyschology and Sexuality* 2, no. 3 (2011): 198-223; Mimi Schippers, *Beyond Monogamy*, (New York: New York University Press, 2016).
[53] Elizabeth F. Emens, "Monogamy's Law," 322.
[54] Ibid, 323.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid, 324.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.

consent that is explicitly encouraged in polyamory assuages pressures to conceal one's non-monogamous desires and practices—behaviors that are characteristic of 'players'.

While being labeled a player might sound like a person who "womanizes" and "has a lot of fun" doing so, when understood from the perspective of a different linguistic community and African American poly men are its target, it is based on a mistaken assumption about "inappropriate" extradyadic relationships or encounters and it can have denigrating effects. In what follows, I describe a few of these effects for the purpose of contributing to a more nuanced view of stereotyping.

Estrangement from oneself

For AAPM, the stereotype of 'player' can and does have enduring effects. One of these is that its use heightens their awareness of their body as an object to oneself. Lauren Freeman elaborates at length about the effects of this enduring harm in her analysis of stereotype threat. When stereotyped as "players", AAPM are "othered" in a way that "one becomes like an object to oneself, seeing, experiencing, and understanding oneself through the lens of harmful stereotypes."[59] When AAPM are stereotyped as players, they experience this heightened awareness of themselves as others in a way that is forced and not voluntary and this is what constitutes the harm.[60] This experience of being stereotyped is involuntary, as AAPM do not choose to have themselves viewed and treated as mere objects. In this way, it resembles the harms incurred by othering African American men under other stereotypes. Further, the pervasiveness of amatonormativity removes their power to change this harmful state of affairs themselves. AAPM have this stereotype "foisted upon [them] by the world they inhabit: by the social norms, attitudes, and stereotypes that are ubiquitous, all of which provide one with a different understanding of

[59] Lauren Freeman, "Embodied Harm: A Phenomenological Engagement with Stereotype Threat," *Human Studies* 40, no. 4 (2017), 649.

[60] There might be a question here about how this 'othering' is different from othering a straight white polyamorous man. The comparative point between black polys being othered and white polys similarly being othered is orthogonal to the point I am making here. Whether white men are or are not harmed in this way does seemingly little to delegitimize the experiences of AAPM who are. However, insofar as black men have historically had their bodies hypersurveiled and hypersexualized in ways that white men have not, the harms incurred by them because of this stereotype would seem to extend racist practices in ways that it does not if it is applied to straight white poly men.

themselves than they'd have if they occupied a dominant social position."[61] This estrangement from one's self hinders the ease with which one is able to navigate the world.

The estrangement occurs because to exist as fully embodied is to take seriously the body understood as a living subject—"the reference point from which perceptions and experiences occur and upon which they depend for their significance."[62] The body, in other words, is the point of origin for subjective experience and plays a role in how we constitute our subjectivity. When AAPM are stereotyped on the basis of their preferences regarding sex, romantic relationships, or their polyamorous identities, they are denied the capacity to exist as fully embodied beings, as their subjective experiences of love become invalidated. AAPM are forced to take stock of their existence as subordinate and inferior to others. This hampers one's self-identity and self-worth. Encounters with the stereotype are not merely one-off occurrences but, in the amatonormative American society, they are more commonly persisting experiences with which we must grapple in ways that those who subscribe to amatonormativity do not. The social denigration pervades the lives of AAPM as it becomes "incorporated into one's day-to-day life and identity such that [it becomes] a background horizon against which or lens through which one experiences one's self and the world."[63]

Restricted Agency

Labeling AAPM as 'players' exemplifies the struggle to redefine African American masculine identity in specific and non-traditional terms[64]—specifically, one that does not conform to the socially acceptable script for romantic love and sex. As a result, the label of 'playa' restricts, no matter how slightly, the agency of AAPM. However, this is no small harm. As Freeman writes, "to exist in the world as a human being is to have possibilities open to one."[65] When confronted with stereotypes like 'playa', the possibilities for what one can be(come) are preemptively foreclosed and one is not able to navigate the world on one's own terms. AAPM become oriented

[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid, 640.
[63] Ibid, 654.
[64] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 161-66.
[65] Lauren Freeman, "Embodied Harm," 655.

to the world in ways that compromise their potential as "the possibility of experiencing a world that is made present to one as an open set of possibilities is impeded."[66]

Labeling AAPM as players also restricts the scope of sexual and romantic acts and identities that they can have and perform.[67] The social audience is unable to interpret this performance, which results in a performative failure on behalf of AAPM. The power of Patricia Hill Collins' controlling images comes into sharp focus here. Labeling AAPM as players speaks to the image of African American men as inferior, hyper-heterosexual beasts incapable of meeting the superior ideals of whiteness and marital monogamy.[68] I believe this is what philosopher Tommy Curry has in mind when he describes the misattributions of White patriarchy to black men creating a peculiar kind of distortion in understanding the access African American men have to powers often attributed to White masculinity. Capturing the thought that black men are "mimetic (white) patriarchs", Curry writes that "the Black male is not born a patriarchal male. He is raced and sexed peculiarly, configured as barbaric and savage, imagined to be a violent animal, not a human being."[69]

Schippers describes how "monogamy is implicated in and productive of gender, race, and sexual hierarchies or the role of monogamy as an organizing rationale for regimes of normalcy and social structures of inequality."[70] More than restricting the agency of AAPM, the gendered and racialized narratives that we tell ourselves about being a 'player' in relation to cheating and womanizing conjoins "black," "heterosexual," "polyamorous relationships," and "polyamorous identity," at a point of intersection where black respectability and amatonormativity create the conditions of unacceptability of AAPM poly lifestyles.[71] Respectable intimate relationships for African American men are monogamous ones that lead to marriage.[72] A married African American

[66] Ibid.
[67] For a thorough discussion of identity performance and socially constructed identity, interested readers should see Judith Butler "Performative acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theater Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519-531.
[68] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 161-66.
[69] Tommy Curry, "Michael Brown and the need for a genre study of Black male death and dying," *Theory and Event* 17, no. 3 (2014).
[70] Schippers, *Beyond Monogamy*, 10.
[71] Mimi Schippers, *Beyond Monogamy: Polyamory and the Future of Polyqueer Sexualities* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 113.
[72] It is worth mentioning here that many of the West African nations that most African Americans are descended from had non-monogamous romantic norms for quite some time. The fact that marriage has come to be a path to respectability is a direct result of colonial violence.

man undermines the controlling image of African American men as being incapable of monogamy and as having uncontrollable sexual urges. As such, amatonormativity is tethered to a politics of Black respectability.[73] Polyamory positions AAPM as deficient before the respectable norms of whitewashed American society. Labeling AAPM players mistakenly positions them as subscribers to amatonormative norms, and thereby implicates a failure at both whiteness and respectability—not allowing them the space to be anything more. Imposing a politics of respectability on to AAPM obscures their own sexual politics—the set of ideas and social practices lying at the heart of beliefs about black masculinity shaped by gender, race, and sexuality, that shape how people relate to African American men.[74]

This prioritization of respectability politics in love and sex relationships not only works to further marginalize AAPM, but it also does not take the transformative potential of African American (intra- or inter-racial) polyamorous relationships seriously enough. These polyamorous relationships have the potential to motivate reorientation to race, gender, and romantic relations.[75] A polyamorous triad comprised of one woman and two men, for example, calls us to not only rethink our amatonormative assumptions, but also sexuality as a mechanism of men's control over and access to women by engaging the double standard that it is only acceptable for men –and not for women- to have multiple partners.

We are also prompted to rethink AAPM's participation in hegemonic heteromasculinity. Insofar as heteronormativity is understood as "the social, cultural, and institutionalized meanings and practices that systematically confer privilege in the forms of status, authority, and material resources on heterosexual people who conform to societal norms,"[76] it might be said that being poly is, instead of a stereotype, an hegemonic heteromasculine emblem of pride in American society. However, AAPM, again, do not admit of participation. AAPM are not afforded access to the institution of marriage. The legitimacy of their perspectives in social discussions about "real love" is often invalidated.[77] Culturally, they become pariahs and are disregarded as less desirable

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[73] For one example of this tethering see, Kaila Adia Story, "On the Cusp of Deviance," in *No Tea, No Shade: New Writings in Black Queer Studies*, ed. E Patrick Johnson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).
[74] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*.
[75] Mimi Schippers, *Beyond Monogamy*, 4.
[76] Ibid, 7.
[77] Carrie Jenkins, *What Love Is.*

romantic partners (as is evidenced in the third example: "*Do you continue with a guy knowing he's a player?"*). AAPM men, then, queer our understanding of what it means to be heteromasculine.[78]

Conclusion

The slut-vs-stud phenomenon maintains that there is no word that denigrates the promiscuous behavior of men. Throughout this paper, I challenge this characterization of the phenomenon as the label of player tends to have denigrating impact on AAPM. I showed how the pervasiveness of amatonormativity in the American context converges at the intersection of men's racialized, gendered, sexual, and romantic identities, to create peculiar challenges for AAPM's love lives. My analysis confronts the need to "account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed."[79] In discussions of polyamory and polyamorous identity, when we do not account for these intersections we constrain the rigor of conversations about polyamory and thereby limit its transformative potential. In this particular case, I argue that labeling AAPM as players is based on misplaced assumptions about AAPM and as a result it denigrates them by estranging them from themselves, and it constrains their ability to exist as fully embodied subjects.

[78] There is a further point that I would like to call attention to here. On my view, people who identify as polyamorous are queer insofar as their choice to identify as such has the effects of subverting our more normalized binary ways of understanding one's romantic status as either "single" or "in *a* relationship". Polyqueerness enables the further possibility of being "in many relationships" in ways that monogamous identity does not. Substantiation of this point, however, would take us too far afield and so shall be left for another time.

[79] Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed A Movement* (New York: The New Press), 358.

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Do Subversive Weddings Challenge Amatonormativity? Polyamorous Weddings and Romantic Love Ideals

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Abstract: Subversive weddings seem to challenge widespread norms regarding romantic love. Weddings have a social significance as capstones of romantic love narratives; often, they serve as symbols of romantic love. Changing their significance would thus be a powerful tool in changing widespread expectations and beliefs regarding romantic love or committed love relationships more generally. Insofar as amatonormativity (the expectation and normative expectation that everyone seeks and flourishes in the same type of dyadic, romantic, sexual love relationship) is harmful, this is a good thing. Polyamorous weddings, for example, seem to challenge the norm that romantic love relationships must be exclusive, and the prevalence of such weddings could increase social visibility of non-exclusive love relationships. It could also lead to greater visibility for other non-traditional life paths, such as prioritizing friendships over romantic love relationships, or abstaining from romantic love relationships. But can subversive weddings really subvert the prevailing norms? One problem is that if weddings – or attempted weddings – diverge too far from the social norms, they may not succeed in changing those norms because they will not be recognized as weddings at all. A second problem is that such weddings may lead to assimilation to, rather than subversion of, dominant norms. This poses a dilemma: if subversive weddings are not in fact weddings, it seems they cannot change the social significance of weddings in the way they are intended to do; but if they are weddings, their attempts at subversion could be undermined because they bear the social significance of weddings.

Keywords: love, polyamory, weddings, amatonormativity, marriage.

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1. Subversive Weddings

Weddings are often seen as a way to express one's personal style. Within the constraints of what we call 'traditional' weddings, this might mean picking just the right shade of flowers and style of dress. But weddings can also be 'alternative', or more individualized: the wedding website *offbeat bride* suggests wedding themes such as steampunk, mermaid, and goth.[1] The content of the vows, as well as venue, décor, and dress, can express the couple's sense of personal style or uniqueness, pushing against the limits of the 'traditional' wedding. This customization of weddings raises the question: How far can one customize or individualize a wedding and still have it be socially recognized as a *wedding*? And what hangs on the answer to this question? That is, what are the social implications of whether an event is socially recognized as a wedding or not?

This question is of particular interest in light of the deployment of subversive weddings – or 'weddings' – as tools of political protest, aimed at changing the social beliefs, expectations and values surrounding romantic love. Subversive weddings were performed before the legal recognition of same-sex marriage to protest the law and to change public opinion regard it. Such weddings were intended to express their participants' desires to be recognized as married, and thereby simultaneously to compel social recognition of the ways in which same-sex relationships resembled different-sex relationships recognized as marriages. Today, polyamorous weddings similarly express their participants' desires for their relationships to be recognized as marriages and they seek to gain social recognition for polyamorous relationships as having equal value to monogamous relationships. Likewise, sologamy – the practice of marrying oneself – expresses the participant's commitment to loving and valuing him- or herself, while also seeking to gain social recognition for the value of a relationship with oneself as equivalent in value to romantic relationships with others.

Polyamorous weddings, sologamy, and other subversive weddings challenge amatonormativity, "the assumptions that a central, exclusive, amorous relationship is normal for humans, in that it is a universally shared goal, and that such a relationship is normative, in that it ***should*** be aimed at in preference to other relationship types."[2] To be successful in this challenge, such weddings must change beliefs regarding the comparative value of relationships, including the

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[1] See http://offbeatbride.com/.

[2] Elizabeth Brake, *Minimizing Marriage: Marriage, Morality, and the Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 88.

relationship with oneself. But subversive weddings also run the risk of being dismissed as not being weddings at all.

Someone might think that legal marriage, with its clearly defined rights and obligations, constrains what can be socially recognized as a wedding. On such a view, only weddings which initiated or were at least associated with legal marriages (perhaps occurring after the legal marriage) could, socially, count as weddings. Hence, a polyamorous or same-sex 'wedding' would not in fact be a wedding in a jurisdiction which failed to recognize them as initiating legal marriages.

But such a view would be too narrow. The rituals which are socially recognized as weddings vary, of course, cross-culturally and trans-historically – and they have not always included legal marriage.[3] Today, one can have what is socially recognized as a wedding without a legal marriage, such as a religious ceremony or backyard handfasting.[4] Likewise, same-sex weddings were recognized as such in countries such as the U.S. and Canada before same-sex marriage was legally recognized.

For example, Karen Dunak describes a mass wedding, celebrating 2,000 same-sex unions, held on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. in 1987. Witnesses to this event – simply called "The Wedding" – recognized it as a wedding; yet the marriages in question were not legally recognized – which was the point. Dunak writes that: "the event incorporated familiar elements of the wedding ceremony. Most participants wore some sort of special dress; … and guests bore witness to the event. The familiarity of the wedding served as a valuable political tool even as it fulfilled the personal desires of same-sex couples who wished to share their lives together."[5] The symbolism of weddings was here explicitly employed as a form of protest, to challenge the legal exclusion of gays and lesbians from marriage; participants' intentions to initiate marriage-like relationships was key to the event's purpose of changing minds about what could count as a marriage, by showing the public instances of same-sex marriage-like relationships.

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[3] For a description of "self-marriages" in the early U.S., in which spouses simply declared themselves married without officiation by authorities, see Nancy Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), Chapter 2.
[4] For a description of contemporary pagan handfasting practices, see Kendra Vaughan Hovey, *Handfasting: A Pagan Guide to Commitment Rituals* (London: Provenance Press, 2007).
[5] Karen Dunak, *As Long as We Both Shall Love: The White Wedding in Postwar America* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), p. 137.

But while atypical events such as this can be socially recognized as weddings, there are numerous events – graduation ceremonies, birthday parties, trials – which it would be simply unintelligible to call 'weddings'. If someone were to refer to such an event as a wedding, what they were trying to say would be opaque; they would simply seem to be mistaken in the usage of the term 'wedding'. So there are constraints on what is socially recognized as a wedding.

Moreover, some wedding-like events would be construed as fake or pretend weddings: a play wedding of dolls enacted by children or a wedding in a movie or play, for example. But presumably some bystanders might have also seen "The Wedding" as such a pretend wedding. For example, some conservatives deny that same-sex marriages are or can be marriages.[6] Presumably, people with such views would understand "The Wedding" as employing the conventions of weddings in the service of something which (in the view of these hypothetical conservative observers) could not be a real marriage – and hence as being only an imitation wedding.

This suggests how we might push the question of the constraints on what is socially recognized as a wedding back: a wedding need not initiate a legal marriage, but, plausibly, a wedding initiates or is at least associated with a marriage – which could be legal, or only religious, or merely socially recognized.[7] This would explain why children's doll weddings are only pretend weddings: they do not initiate marriages (except perhaps pretend marriages). And it would explain why the conservative would deny that "The Wedding" was a genuine wedding: because they deny that same-sex marriages are genuine marriages.

It might be thought that it is not the actual initiation of a marriage which defines a wedding, but rather, the participants' intentions to initiate a marriage. Stage actors do not intend to initiate a marriage, any more than their actions initiate a marriage. Likewise, we might think that pre-*Obergefell*[8] same-sex protest weddings were weddings because the participants intended them to initiate marriages. But the intent to initiate a marriage cannot be a necessary condition for a wedding. Imagine someone who went through a wedding ceremony intending to play a practical joke, with no intention of marrying. It seems likely to me that the event would still have been socially recognized a wedding, despite the lack of intention to marry. It also does not seem that

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[6] See for example John Finnis, "The Good of Marriage and the Morality of Sexual Relations: Some Philosophical and Historical Observations," *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 42 (1997): 97–134, p. 102.

[7] It is possible for a wedding to occur after a legal marriage, celebrating it; hence, while I will speak of weddings as initiating marriages for shorthand, the requirement is the weaker one that the wedding at least be associated with a marriage. Thanks to Daniela Cutas for this point.

[8] The 2015 case in which the US Supreme Court found same-sex couples have a right to marry.

intending to initiate a marriage can be a sufficient condition for a wedding. Recall the examples of unintelligible 'weddings' above. Someone who intends to initiate a marriage by participating in, say, a graduation ceremony is simply deeply confused.

For the purposes of argument, let us assume that what can count, socially, as a wedding piggybacks on what can count, socially, as a marriage.[9] Roughly, as a stipulative definition to be re-assessed later, a wedding is a public and socially recognized event which initiates a marriage. But this leaves us with the question of what can be socially understood as a marriage. We do not have to look far to find problem cases. Here are some examples, self-described by participants both as weddings and as initiating marriages, where there is at least a question as to whether they are really socially understood as weddings, or as leading to marriages, as opposed to imitations:

- Self-marriage or "sologamy," in which people wed themselves, which *Cosmopolitan* calls a "small but growing movement."[10]
- Performance artists Elizabeth Stephens' and Annie Sprinkle's "ecosex weddings," through which they seek to eroticize the natural world, partly to make environmentalism fun. These artists have married themselves to the dirt (in a ceremony in which they rolled in the dirt) and to Lake Kallavesi (in a ceremony in which they jumped in the lake). They have also married coal, rocks, snow, the moon, the Appalachian Mountains, the earth, sky, and sea.[11]
- Erika Eiffel married the Eiffel tower via a "commitment ceremony," and Eija-Riitta Berliner-Mauer married the Berlin Wall, both taking the surname of their love object.[12]
- People have 'married' their pets, including one woman who, according to the *New York Daily News*, married her dog when her first husband – a cat – died.[13]
- And, of course, there have been "Throuple" weddings, in which three people marry each other as a unit (first, three Massachusetts women in a legally unrecognized ceremony, and more recently three men in Colombia, who succeeded in gaining legal recognition).

[9] Of course, there is a debate in the literature on marriage as to what defines marriage – nature, function, procreation, and so on. I have in mind here the narrow historical, anthropological, or sociological question of how different communities understand marriage.

[10] Abigail Pesta, "Why I Married Myself," Cosmopolitan, December 20, 2016, www.cosmopolitan.com/sex-love/a8507112/marrying-yourself-wedding-trend/. See also https://imarriedme.com/.

[11] See sexecology.org.

[12] See news reports in *The Telegraph.* (www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/howaboutthat/2074301/Woman-with-objects-fetish-marries-Eiffel-Tower.html, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/howaboutthat/2035996/Woman-married-to-Berlin-Wall-for-29-years.html).

[13] See marryyourpet.com, and a news report at http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/dutch-woman-marry-dog-cat-husband-dies-article-1.2299047.

Polyamorous weddings can include weddings either of more than two partners or weddings of couples who intend to be polyamorous. (For now, I'll define polyamory simply as having multiple love and sex relationships.)[14]

What interests me about these cases is that the brides and grooms ('weddors'?) want to invoke some aspects of mainstream marriage while extending them or subverting other aspects. In this way, what they are doing differs from children wedding their dolls or actors in a play: they intend to make a statement about their love and commitment by invoking the symbolism or meaning of weddings and marriage. These weddings are not instances of unintelligibly, mistakenly, or arbitrarily calling an event with no resemblance to a wedding a 'wedding'. Exactly as couples did in "The Wedding," these people invoke symbolic aspects of weddings as well as aspects of the social significance of weddings both to make a statement about their relationships and to change social beliefs about non-typical relationships.

For example, a theme in the pet wedding community is the mutual unconditional love between human and pet. Pet weddings invoke the wedding vows' pledge of unconditional love while extending it to non-traditional love objects. Likewise, Stephens and Sprinkle want to express erotic love towards the things they marry, as do Erika Eiffel and Eija-Riitta Berliner-Mauer, who are object fetishists. They are extending the scope of what we can have erotic love for beyond persons who can reciprocate – while perhaps also seeking to challenge understandings of reciprocity and personhood. Sologamists who wed themselves are expressing their self-love. At the same time, they are rejecting the amatonormative pressure to partner with another person which 'traditional' weddings enshrine. They challenge the amatonormative belief that everyone seeks and flourishes in the same type of dyadic, romantic, sexual love relationship by demonstrating that they flourish outside of such a relationship.[15] Finally, polyamorists who wed tend to reject the possessiveness and exclusivity of 'traditional' wedding vows but want to express love and commitment.

All of these 'weddors' do not merely seek to disrupt the meaning of weddings and marriage. Rather, they seek to invoke some of the norms of marriage (commitment, love, trust) while extending them to non-traditional objects, relationships, or numbers of people, and also sometimes

[14] See news reports at https://nypost.com/2014/04/23/married-lesbian-threesome-expecting-first-child/ and www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/03/colombia-three-men-union-alejandro-rodriguez-manuel-bermudez-victor-hugo-prada.

[15] See Brake, *Minimizing Marriage*, 88-108.

rejecting other norms (exclusivity, speciesism, having another human as one's partner). These weddings do not merely invoke conventions ironically, keeping an emotional distance and meaning the opposite of what the conventions typically signify; they retain a degree of sincerity about the project.

One question this raises is whether these are socially recognizable as weddings at all. While we can understand the intentions behind them in relation to weddings, is a ceremony with a pet or inanimate object really socially recognized as a wedding? This is, of course, an empirical question, and the answer will depend on the relevant society or community; but I want to suggest that either way, whether subversive weddings are socially recognized as weddings or not, there is a challenge for the would-be subversive. The problem is how far such weddings can subvert social conventions by employing them, at least in part, sincerely.

To be clear, my view is that this proliferation of weddings is an interesting phenomenon, not a cause for concern or for questioning the legalization of same-sex marriage. Because conservatives have often invoked the specter of polygamy, bestiality, and incest against legalizing same-sex marriage (with the argument that it is a slippery slope to recognizing the other cases as marriages), highlighting the phenomenon of pet weddings or polyamorous weddings might seem to add fuel to their fire.[16] But the conservative argument, so far as it involves legal marriage, is faulty. Legal marriage is a voluntarily entered contract; animals and children cannot enter legal contracts, and so, under a just law of marriage in which participants enter with voluntary consent, legal marriage is simply not a possibility for them.[17] Nor does recognizing committed sexual relationships, whether same-sex or different-sex, between adult humans on grounds of equal treatment have any implications for changing laws prohibiting sex with children, which is rights-violating, or sex with non-humans, which may involve cruelty to animals. Group weddings are a more complicated case, as arguably they could be recognized on equal treatment grounds for the same reason as same-sex marriages – but only if doing so is not likely to cause serious harm.[18]

[16] For a summary of and response to such arguments, see John Corvino, "Homosexuality and the PIB Argument," *Ethics* 115 (2005).

[17] Of course, as an anonymous reviewer helpfully pointed out, child marriage does exist in some jurisdictions. However, minors who are incompetent to consent to sex or to make their own medical decisions are likewise not competent to consent to the legal ramifications of marriage; child marriage should thus be abolished where it does exist.

[18] On this issue, see Cheshire Calhoun, "Who's Afraid of Polygamous Marriage? Lessons for Same-Sex Marriage Advocacy from the History of Polygamy," *San Diego Law Review* 42 (2005); Brake, *Minimizing Marriage*, Chapter 7; for an opposing view, see Thom Brooks, "The Problem of Polygamy," *Philosophical Topics* 37, no. 2 (2009).

Weddings, as I have noted above, are distinct from legal marriage, and their performance need have no legal implications: so pet weddings need not change the law of marriage, for example.

Furthermore, the performance of subversive weddings may do good by challenging amatonormativity, the false belief that everyone is seeking the same kind of romantic, monogamous, sexual love relationship, and the accompanying evaluative judgment that such a relationship is best for everyone. This widespread norm is harmful when it socially marginalizes friends, singles, asexuals, and polyamorists, and when it is used to provide an alleged justification for legal discrimination against them. It is also particularly harmful for women, as women undergo greater social pressure to marry and to sacrifice on marriage.[19] Thus, by undermining amatonormative beliefs and judgments, subversive weddings could do good – for instance, by affirming the intrinsic value and worth of women without a partner or members of non-traditional relationships.

The question is whether and how far can we subvert beliefs, values, and expectations surrounding romantic love by employing one of the very conventions which, in part, perpetuates those values, beliefs, and expectations. There are several questions lurking here which I want to distinguish and set aside. One is the general philosophical question of how social conventions and practices have meanings and how these change. Another is the sociological or psychological question of how conventions and related social pressures shape our behavior. For instance, there is an empirical question about whether and how same-sex marriage has affected behavior around gender roles and expectations or the behavior of same-sex married couples.[20] Likewise, there is research showing that men and women who intend to enter marriages with egalitarian divisions of labor eventually revert to a gendered division of labor.[21] I want to set aside this question about how legal status and social roles and conventions can change the behavior of people who intend to defy them.

The question of interest here is whether an intentionally subversive wedding can change the conventions and beliefs surrounding romantic love if it is not socially recognized as a wedding

[19] The social costs of amatonormativity are discussed in Brake, *Minimizing Marriage*, 88-108.
[20] For an interesting preliminary study on the effects of same-sex marriage on financial interdependence in gay and lesbian couples, see Charlotte Bendall and Rosie Harding, "Heteronormativity in dissolution proceedings: Exploring the impact of recourse to legal advice in same sex relationship breakdown," in Elizabeth Brake and Lucinda Ferguson, eds., *Philosophical Foundations of Children's and Family Law* (Oxford University Press, 2018).
[21] See Clare Chambers, *Against Marriage: An Egalitarian Defence of the Marriage-Free State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 20-21.

– or, indeed, if it is. There seems to be a dilemma for the would-be subversive. On the one hand, it seems as if a subversive wedding must be socially recognized as a wedding in order to subvert the meaning of weddings. Otherwise it is parody or performance art; it could be about weddings, but not extend or change what they mean. While parody and performance art can both be deployed to subvert or change common beliefs, part of the intended subversion of subversive weddings involves the recognition of the event as a wedding in order to change beliefs about which relationships have value, can be celebrated through weddings and recognized as marriages, and so on.

On the other hand, if the event is socially recognized as a wedding, another risk arises. This is the risk that it then will bear the social significance and attendant expectations associated with weddings – despite the authors' intentions. For example, a feminist wedding intending to celebrate egalitarian relationships could prompt the expectations from the community that the bride will take on certain gendered responsibilities: writing thank-you notes and corresponding with family. Thus, there is a dilemma: if 'subversive weddings' are not weddings, they cannot subvert or extend the social significance of weddings in the way that they seek to; but if they are weddings, their attempts at subversion could be undermined because they bear the social significance assigned to weddings.

The second horn of the dilemma parallels one concern raised in the same-sex marriage debates. Some same-sex marriage advocates argued that same-sex marriage would transform marriage and gender roles. But queer theorists argued that, rather than transforming marriage, same-sex marriage would invoke the heteronormative expectations and meanings attached to marriage and as a result put pressure on same-sex relationships to assimilate to dominant norms of different-sex relationships.[22] For example, as a result of legal recognition for same-sex marriage, young gays and lesbians might now be pressured to marry – a pressure previously trained mainly on straight young people.

To adapt Hegel's comments about arson in *The Philosophy of Right*: someone who lights a bit of wood on fire cannot deny that he has committed arson because he only intended to light that bit of wood, and not the pile in which it sat. If I knowingly do the series of actions which are socially and legally defined as arson (lighting a match, throwing it into someone's woodpile), but

[22] For one such argument, see Michael Warner, "Response to Martha Nussbaum," *California Law Review* 98, no. 3 (2010); for an overview, see Chambers, *Against Marriage*, 28-38.

claim that I did not have the relevant intention, I have nonetheless committed arson.[23] Our intentions alone do not determine the meanings of actions which are constituted through social conventions and social recognition.

By parity of reasoning, if I go through the actions which constitute a polyamorous wedding, and weddings are socially defined as signifying exclusivity, then I cannot deny that significance or socially assigned meaning, just as the firestarter cannot deny that he has committed arson.[24] A wedding signals (assuming this is the social meaning) exclusivity; by wedding, I have now invoked expectations of exclusivity and assigned that meaning to my relationship. The socially defined nature of conventions also seems to entail that I can intend to do a socially defined action, but fail to do so. This raises the possibility that I could intend to wed myself or my cat but simply fail at wedding (just as the person who goes through a graduate ceremony intending to wed fails at wedding).

It might be thought that it is not a problem if success conditions for weddings depend on social or community recognition of the act as a wedding, because anyone with access to the internet can likely find the relevant community. But outside the relevant community, two potential problems arise. These are, again, the two horns of the dilemma.

Option One: Failed weddings

Whenever there is no uptake or social recognition, are subversive weddings simply failed weddings – that is, not weddings at all?[25] We might ask why this matters. Even though they might not be recognized as such, when we hear of such weddings, we can roughly grasp the intention: to commit or to express love. This is even true in cases which intend to subvert the norms of marriage. Even failed weddings still express an intention regarding the relationship, just as a commitment ceremony does. They can make a political statement, just as parody or performance art can. But some people engaging in such performance view themselves, and wish to be viewed, as wedding,

[23] G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right,* trans. H. B. Nisbet, ed. Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 147-150.

[24] For example, in his defense of same-sex marriage, Ralph Wedgewood argues that there is a core social understanding of marriage. See Ralph Wedgwood, "The Fundamental Argument for Same-Sex Marriage," *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 7, no. 3 (1999). See also his "Is Civil Marriage Illiberal?" in *After Marriage: Rethinking Marital Relationships*, ed. Elizabeth Brake (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[25] On the parallel issue of whether wedding vows fail as promises, see Elizabeth Brake, "Is Divorce Promise-Breaking?," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 14 (2011).

like the same-sex couples in "The Wedding" or like the polyamorists I discuss below, and so this matters, at least, to them. Furthermore, insofar as the social change they are aiming at involves compelling recognition of the event as a wedding, social recognition matters.

Option Two: Backfiring weddings

This is perhaps the more serious problem for the would-be subversive. Because the meaning of a convention does not depend only on an agent's intentions, a would-be subversive may inadvertently signify something she did not intend or even which she intended to reject. Someone who marries within a lesbian poly community, for example, may intend to signify that her relationship is egalitarian and non-possessive and simultaneously suggest the potential for egalitarian non-possessive marriages in general. But in the larger community she might have labeled herself as a subordinate (perhaps that community can only see marriage as hierarchical) or as exclusive. Even if her relationship does not adhere to traditional norms, she may be perceived in various contexts as exemplifying those norms, irrespective of the facts of her relationship. For example, whenever she uses a term such as 'wife' or 'husband' or 'marriage', her interlocutor may assume a traditional usage. To correct this, she would have to divulge personal information, possibly inappropriate or even dangerous in a given context, whenever she uses these terms.

To sum up so far: To be a wedding, an event must be recognized by some community as a wedding, as (according to the stipulative definition) an event which initiates a marriage; this need not require legal or religious recognition, but the recognition of some community or society. While the ongoing relationships which they celebrate may be lived out in private, weddings are to this extent public and social. This is reflected in the fact that weddings often require an officiant and witnesses and usually include members of the larger community as an audience. At the same time, each individual wedding contributes to the social understanding of weddings by representing what a wedding is.

I will return to the dilemma below, after using polyamorous weddings as a test case to think through the problem. I will consider how polyamorous weddings both invoke and potentially subvert social norms surrounding weddings and romantic love. They have the potential to critique amatonormative social expectations which are the focal point of weddings – and possibly to a

greater extent than monogamous same-sex or feminist weddings. I will begin by sketching the romantic love ideals which polyamorous weddings challenge.

2. Wedding romances

Weddings, I want to venture, are widely and popularly associated with a set of romantic yearnings, closely linked to a consumerist, wedding-industry-fueled drive to achieve a certain presentation or expression of the couple's identity.[26] These romantic yearnings, directed at the other party, are often seen as symbolized by and culminating in the wedding itself. (Indeed, the wedding itself seems to become an object of desire for many, as evidenced by the fascination with wedding planning, images of weddings, and wedding-related consumer goods.) The emotional force of wedding-related symbolism is why subversive weddings could be a particularly effective means of protest or change. And insofar as the romantic yearnings associated with weddings are amatonormative, such subversion is a good thing. Moreover, to the extent that such yearnings are inherently unsatisfiable, creating expectations which can never be fulfilled, subversive weddings which diminish their force have other social benefits.

It might be objected that weddings do not primarily express romantic attitudes. For instance, they might primarily express a desire to involve the community in one's relationship and invoke its protective regard, particularly within small religious communities.[27] Or, they could be seen as ritually enacting the transfer of possession of a virgin bride, an untouched piece of property, from father to husband.[28] Or, they could serve to establish a certain social cachet and class identification.[29] But my claim is not meant to be universal, or to exclude other such symbolism. Indeed, I don't want to suggest that the romantic yearnings associated with weddings are ahistorical or culturally transcendent, before the "Love Revolution" in marriage broadly transformed marriage from a property and kinship relation to an aspiring union of soulmates.[30] I merely want to suggest that in some contemporary societies, weddings enact, and ask the community to recognize, certain romantic yearnings – or the fantasy of their satisfaction.

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[26] This draws on the analysis of the wedding industry and beliefs about love in Laura Kipnis, *Against Love: A Polemic* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2003).
[27] Roger Scruton, *Sexual Desire* (London: The Free Press, 1986), 358-359.
[28] See, for example, Clare Chambers, "The Marriage-Free State," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 113, Part 2 (2013), and her *Against Marriage*, Chapter 1.
[29] See Linda C. McClain, "The Other Marriage Equality Problem," *Boston University Law Review* 93, no. 3 (2013).
[30] See Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage: a History* (London: Penguin, 2006).

For it could be that these yearnings are unrealistic expectations which the social narratives surrounding weddings propagate. It would not be surprising to find that wedding culture perpetuates unrealistic expectations or confused beliefs about romantic love: arguably, deep conceptual confusions likewise underlie assumptions about the morally transformative power of weddings. For example, promises to love are problematic at best; yet Instagram and Pinterest suggest that more attention is paid to flowers, dresses, and venues than to the moral significance of wedding vows. This is unfortunate if it detracts from attention to the legal ramifications of marriage and the emotional substance of the relationship itself.[31] Here I want to focus on a different set of unrealistic expectations, regarding romantic love, disseminated through wedding culture, and how polyamorous weddings challenge them.

What are these romantic yearnings of which weddings symbolize the culmination? To be clear, I am not arguing that these yearnings constitute or exhaust the romantic love ideal. I am making the more modest point that romantic love is often portrayed as, or believed to involve, certain yearning for uniqueness. I want to distinguish between two sets of yearnings. The first is for uniqueness and irreplaceability: to be the unique, irreplaceable beloved, in the sense that the lover loves no one else, and could not love anyone else in this way. Some recent philosophical work arguing that monogamy has a distinctive nature, meriting special legal treatment, suggests that uniqueness and irreplaceability are important psychologically. Chris Bennett has argued that by feeling one is the *only* beloved, one's sense of value is confirmed. This feeling of uniqueness confirms one's worth and importance precisely because no one else could do; one has been chosen above all others.[32] Drawing on work by biologist Helen Fisher, Eric Cave describes "symptoms" of erotic love, including jealousy – suggesting that the desire for exclusivity is biologically inherent to erotic love.[33] Yearnings to be the unique beloved and irreplaceable to one's lover are certainly satisfiable; but given the frequency with which they are disappointed, we might ask whether these are prudent goals to have.

[31] See Brake, "Is Divorce Promise-Breaking?"
[32] Christopher Bennett, "Liberalism, Autonomy, and Conjugal Love," *Res Publica* 9 (2003).
[33] Eric Cave, "Liberalism, Civil Marriage, and Amorous Caregiving Dyads," *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, OnlineFirst (2017), https://doi-org.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/10.1111/japp.12282. For one response to such views of love, see Carrie Jenkins, "Modal Monogamy." *Ergo* 2:8 (2015), http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/ergo.12405314.0002.008. See also Natasha McKeever, "Is the Requirement of Sexual Exclusivity Consistent with Romantic Love?," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 34, no. 3 (2017).

A second, distinct yearning is unsatisfiable; this is that implicit in the popular idea of a unique "soulmate." The yearning for "specialness" or non-contingency goes beyond the yearning to be the unique and irreplaceable beloved: it is to desire not only that no-one else currently, or in the future, be the beloved, but that no one else *could have been* the beloved. This yearning for a unique soulmate is expressed in Aristophanes' famous myth in Plato's *Symposium*: the beloved is our other half, the only piece who could fit us, to whom we crave to be rejoined.[34] Perhaps the imagined fulfillment of this yearning for non-contingency serves as a bulwark against recognizing the contingency of our own existence, our finitude and mortality. To be necessary to another makes us necessary.

But the presence of particular others in our lives is contingent, even wildly so. It is random that X and Y should meet, should be unattached to anyone else, should be attracted to one another, and have the time and ability to develop a relationship. This assumption has a corollary: it easily could all have been otherwise, with X meeting Z instead. The alternatives to this assumption, that two people meeting is God's will or destiny, strike me as utterly implausible, although the soulmate view, if taken seriously, seems bound up with some such metaphysics. This contingency of meeting and mating conflicts with the yearning of romantic love to be the only possible beloved. If the relationship is contingent, other loves were possible.

Recognizing the contingency of our relationships and the possibility of our partner's other lovers is conceptually connected with recognizing the separateness of the other, their independent existence and experience. If we can love others beyond our beloved, whom our beloved does not also love, then we are separate beings, not a unity. The drive for union (as marriage has historically been characterized), so literally depicted in Aristophanes' myth, is a drive to transcend this separateness, precluding other loves and the separateness of the other.

There is thus a conceptual linkage between recognizing the contingency of the relationship itself, the possibility of other lovers, and the other's independent experience. By acknowledging these facts, we may be less deceived, in the poet Philip Larkin's phrase, although disappointed; but, we may say, so much the worse for the yearnings and illusions of romantic love. Metaphysically, acknowledging separateness and contingency is more accurate; ethically, that recognition may be the basis of a radical transformation from self-centered love, yearning for the satisfaction of certain desires, to other-centered love, recognizing the independence of other, as a

[34] Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989).

necessary condition to true benevolence. (No doubt most of the time this is a matter of continua and see-sawing.) In short, revealing the yearning to find one's unique soulmate – and to be someone's unique soulmate – to be based on false beliefs and hence inherently unsatisfiable could benefit people by encouraging a more realistic evaluation of their expectations and beliefs (including a re-evaluation of their failure to find such a soulmate).

This also has implications for challenging amatonormativity. To the extent that the belief in a unique soulmate is part of romantic love ideals, then it is part of amatonormative assumptions about the value of romantic love. Recognizing that the romantic yearning for non-contingency (to be a unique soulmate) is inherently unsatisfiable, then, would be a corrective to the amatonormative assumption that the satisfaction of this yearning is a condition of human flourishing. And recognizing that the romantic yearning for uniqueness and irreplaceability is often unsatisfied also serves to correct amatonormative expectations. Of course, the beliefs and expectations concerned here are popular assumptions sustained through media, social media, and practices, and not – usually – through philosophical argument; but this is just why subversive weddings, which can propagate a different symbolism, are positioned to change them.

3. Polyamorous weddings

What does this brief sketch of wedding-related romantic yearnings have to do with subversive weddings, and specifically with polyamorous weddings? Let us start with 'traditional' monogamous weddings. I suggested that the psychological importance so many attach to weddings issues from the drive to satisfy these romantic and existential yearnings for specialness, uniqueness, and union. I would add that the wedding industry harnesses these drives to sell its expensive products and services. The specialness of the wedding comes to stand in for the specialness of the union, and of each member; thus the drive to individualize, to express oneself, through the wedding. Just as the spouses-to-be are the irreplaceable, unique objects of love, so too the wedding is unique and irreplaceable (at least, so they hope). The image of the bride too is of a *singular* object of desire (no matter how many times such images are replicated). It is *her* day – and no-one else's. (This recalls Simone de Beauvoir's claim that a woman in love aspires to transcendence through her connection to the male love object.[35])

[35] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans., ed. H. M. Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 234-239.

This investment of romantic yearnings into weddings is plausibly explained by the fact that weddings serve as a capstone of romantic love narratives. Instead of replaceability, separateness, and contingency, they symbolize irreplaceability, union, and specialness, partly through the spoken wedding vows. And these vows initiate marital status, in which each is unique *qua* spouse, in a union intended to be buttressed against contingency ("in sickness or in health …").

The feminist analysis of marriage as a form of property offers insight into how weddings offer the fulfillment of the romantic yearnings. If marriage is a property relation, weddings are an act of taking possession, by which the other person is made into a thing, for it is only things which can be owned (this is what Kant struggled with in his account of marriage[36]). Weddings (illusively) appear to make static and permanent something which is by its nature contingent and impermanent, the love relationship; as an act of taking possession of the other's *love*, they appear to satisfy the yearnings for uniqueness and irreplaceability. If I take possession of your love, you cannot give it to anyone else. But this reflects an aspect of the difficulty of love of which Jean-Paul Sartre wrote, the tension between yearning to possess another's love and recognition of the freedom and subjectivity of the other person, a tension which Sartre thought essential to erotic love. Of course, taking possession of another's love by making it unchanging is impossible; not so much because love cannot last, but because – as Sartre points out – the love which is wanted is freely and spontaneously given.[37]

Polyamorous weddings challenge all that; insofar as weddings are a social script for satisfying the romantic yearnings, for making love relationships permanent by taking possession of the other's love, polyamorous weddings destabilize that script. What is destabilizing about polyamorous weddings is not the sex part, as one might think – but the love part. They do not necessarily challenge sexual exclusivity, as polyfidelity incorporates sexual exclusivity between more than two people. Likewise, a couple in a loving dyadic marriage could agree to have sex with other people but to refrain from loving them, maintaining their status as each other's unique love object. The challenge to the romantic yearnings is not sexual openness but the possibility – and even desirability – of multiple non-hierarchical love relationships. Although we know we can love

[36] Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor, in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 426-432.
[37] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 356.

many friends, children, or siblings, in a monogamist society romantic love is unique, singular, special.

Polyamorous weddings, even more than the practice of polyamory, are poised to threaten the understanding of romantic love as aiming at uniqueness, irreplaceability, and finding one's soulmate. They make public a different script, one directly opposed to the romantic narratives of weddings. Polyamorous weddings celebrate romantic love without a unique and irreplaceable (at least *qua* love object) beloved, commitment without exclusivity.

Polyamory challenges the romantic love ideal associated with the yearnings I have sketched not only because it allows for multiple love relationships, but also because it is essentially fluid. Polyamory does not merely consist in multiple love or sex relationships but is additionally constituted by a commitment to values such as radical honesty, openness, non-possessiveness, autonomy, and communication.[38] Of course, polyamorists, like monogamists, can cheat (I do not want to idealize polyamory!), and, having invoked de Beauvoir and Sartre and the specter of their problematic relationship, I should acknowledge that polyamory can, as Thom Brooks notes,[39] devolve into the most inegalitarian form of gendered relationship. However, the polyamorist ideal involves commitment to arrangements agreed to through a process of honesty, communication, and ongoing consent, and not to a fixed form. It could involve an open dyadic relationship, or relationships among primary and secondary partners, or polyfidelity. Moreover, its aspirations to consensual, communicative relationships require fluidity or openness to changing arrangements.

By its nature, polyamory, in its ideal form, challenges the features of romantic love which weddings symbolize. It challenges the yearning for uniqueness and irreplaceability simply because it permits romantic love for more than one person. It challenges the yearning for specialness because it implicitly acknowledges the contingency of relations, through its openness to revisiting the terms of the relationship and because involvement in other love relationships compels recognition of the contingency of the relationship, of the fact that others could have been 'the one'.

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[38] See Deborah Anapol, *Polyamory in the 21st Century: Love and Intimacy with Many Partners* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010); Elizabeth Brake, "Is 'Loving More' Better?: The Values of Polyamory," *The Philosophy of Sex: Contemporary Readings*, 7th edition, ed. Raja Halwani, Sarah Hoffman, and Alan Soble (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), and "Recognizing Care: The Case for Friendship and Polyamory," *Syracuse Law and Civic Engagement Journal* 1 (2014), http://slace.syr.edu/. See also Luke Brunning, "The Distinctiveness of Polyamory," *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, OnlineFirst (2016), https://doi-org.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/10.1111/japp.12240.

[39] Brooks, "The Problem of Polygamy." While Brooks' paper mainly focuses on polygamy, he makes this comment in response to the objection that polyamory does not share the inegalitarian features of polygamy.

It challenges the associated ideal of union or non-separateness by acknowledging the reality of the other's independence. It does this both because it acknowledges the other's separate loves and pleasure and because it focuses on communication, autonomy, and consent. In its ideal form it reflects de Beauvoir's description of genuine love as "the mutual recognition of … liberties; the lovers would experience themselves both as self and as other."[40] Finally, it challenges the symbolic taking possession of the other's love by its fluid and open arrangements. Weddings initiate marriages, with fixed roles and expectations. Weddings fix relationships into more or less rigid rules; polyamory is fluid and open to ongoing re-arrangement, relationship-based rather than role-based, with terms defined by mutual, ongoing consent. Thus, polyamorous weddings subvert the romantic narratives I have suggested that weddings entrench, that such romantic yearnings can be fulfilled through marriage.

It might be thought that polygamy also challenges these aspects of the romantic love ideal. But polygamy tends to reflect a pre-Love-Revolution understanding of weddings and marriage; that is, polygamists often tend to be motivated by religious ideals and focus on gendered spousal roles, not romantic love, as definitional of marriage. Polygamists are typically not in the marriage-for-romantic-love game to begin with, so their practices hardly challenge that ideal; they are not invoking it. Whereas polygamists tend to aim at marriage, polyamorists have emphasized self-defined relationships.

This brings us to a final way in which polyamorous weddings flout the norms of weddings and marriages. Polyamorous weddings are weddings without legal marriages (so far, except possibly in Colombia). (In this they are reminiscent of pre-legal or extra-legal self-marriage, where spouses married themselves to one another by declaration without legal recognition, a kind of marital Wild West.[41]) Because of the differences between polyamory and the romantic ideals of marriage, polyamorists have not often sought legal marriage (though this is now changing) even when they have sought other legal protections. Much polyamorist writing has in fact *opposed* marriage. Socially, polyamorous weddings are not widely understood as instituting marriages. If what is understood by standing in the role of a spouse entails exclusivity, then they cannot be standing (socially) in the role of spouses. How then do they fare on the dilemma sketched above?

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[40] De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* 239.
[41] On the history of "self-marriage" in the U.S., see Cott, *Public Vows*, Chapter 2.

4. Weddings without Marriages

Option One: Failed Weddings

The first horn of the dilemma is that polyamorous weddings are failed weddings: they are only wedding-like. Their participants intended to initiate a marriage through them, but failed to do so. If weddings initiate marriages, and polyamorous arrangements are not marriages, then their celebrations cannot be weddings. This is not so bad: as I noted above, these events can still express certain intentions and make commitments, like a commitment ceremony, without being weddings. They may also begin to alter social norms, as parody or performance art can. They can make political statements without being weddings.

One way to avoid this horn of the dilemma is to argue that polyamorous weddings are weddings, and that they initiate polyamorous marriages. For this to be the case, non-exclusive group marriages must be possible. While I think such marriages are possible, there is another alternative which suggests that our stipulative definition of weddings as initiating marriages is unnecessarily restrictive.

This is that polyamorous weddings are weddings which do not initiate marriages, and so we should reject the definition of weddings assumed at the outset. This alternative seems to reflect how some polyamorists actually understand their weddings. At least some of the time, polyamorous weddings are not intended to initiate marriages at all but to celebrate love and commitment before a gathering of friends and family. Author Angi Becker Stephens writes of her polyamorous wedding: "I want to have a wedding for the same reasons I imagine most people want to have them…: to bring the people I care about together to celebrate a love and a commitment that already exist, to stand in front of my friends and family and declare that I love this person and he loves me and we intend to stick together for the long haul."[42] This suggests another solution to the dilemma: the stipulative definition which I gave above of weddings as events which initiate marriages should be rejected. There can be weddings without marriages, social recognition of a relationship and a commitment without expectations of fixed roles, uniqueness, irreplaceability, and unique soulmate status. On this alternative, weddings are like commitment ceremonies.

[42] Angi Becker Stephens, "A poly wedding: My decision to marry my boyfriend while I'm legally married to my husband," July 31, 2013, http://offbeatbride.com/a-polyamorous-wedding/.

Can one have a wedding – a ritual and party celebrating a relationship – with no marriage in the offing? Such a revision of the significance of weddings might seem to present problems. If a wedding need not initiate a marriage, but need only celebrate a relationship, why not call all sorts of things weddings – such as children's blood brothers or best friends rituals, college reunions, or team meetings? In response, commitment ceremonies are generally understood to celebrate loving intimate relationships. There is no reason to think that weddings could not also be so understood, which would rule out college reunions and team meetings. But particularly because polyamory is so fluid and open-ended, it is challenging to rule out non-romantic love relationships. In a polyamorous relationship of four people, for example, two members could remain loving and committed to one another yet lack a romantic love connection. And the romantic status between members of a polyamorous network could, of course, change over time.

However, the implication that weddings could celebrate non-romantic best friend relationships could be a benefit of this account, rather than a *reductio*. If weddings could celebrate loving relationships beyond amorous dyads, including other close, long-term relationships – such as best friends – this would make another contribution to challenging amatonormativity. Socially, this would be one way to put non-romantic relationships on an equal footing with romantic partnerships.

The proliferation of alternative weddings – as well as the commercial impulse to focus on weddings, not marriages – suggests that socially, weddings and marriages are already coming unyoked. If weddings are defined socially, this suggests that the definition might be changing from "events which initiate marriages" to "events which celebrate love relationships." While the cultural obsession with weddings appears to be a symptom of amatonormativity, the diversification of weddings could weaken amatonormativity, *if* it allows for the celebration of diverse kinds of love (such as for friends). Moreover, if the symbolism of weddings is detached from satisfying the romantic yearnings, it could weaken the social pressure to pursue romantic yearnings at the cost of other loving relationships.

Option Two: Backfiring weddings

Of course, if weddings cannot be detached from marriages, and marriages are associated with the romantic love ideal, then subversive weddings might backfire, reinforcing the romantic love ideal. As with same-sex marriage, the threat of assimilationism arises. Could polyamory be ossified into fixed roles? Rather than recognizing the limitless possibilities of relationships and eroticism, will "my one and only" simply be replaced with "my two and onlies"? Fluidity, ongoing consent, and communication are essential to polyamory. By moving into wedding culture, let alone marriage, the threat is that polyamorists who wed will be stamped with rigid roles and romantic ideals – that weddings will change polyamory rather than vice-versa.

Wedding polyamorists must perform the fine balance of seeking community recognition through a cultural form while attempting to subvert or change this cultural form. In her essay, Stephens wrestles with her polyamorous wedding, because she worries that she is driven by desires to make her alternative relationship seem more 'normal': "there is a part of me that wants the cultural validation of marriage, of declaring that this love is as real as any other."[43] This is reminiscent of queer theorist's Michael Warner's warning that same-sex marriage may be "a political shortcut to dignity and respect from straight people through the granting of marriage rights.... to argue for gay marriage on these grounds is to despair that respect can be compelled on any other terms."[44]

Stephens resolves her anxieties by arguing that "there's something wonderfully defiant about standing up and saying that neither the state or society can dictate whether or not we are fully committed to one another … we can take the old traditions and infuse them with whatever meaning we choose, as long as we are conscious and intentional about doing so."[45] She sees her wedding as redefining what a commitment can mean and what love counts as "real."

The question I have raised is whether it is possible to do this through the vehicle of a *wedding*. My answer is somewhat equivocal. In some contexts, a polyamorous couple introducing themselves as spouses may serve to (in small part) reinforce assumptions concerning marriage. But as subversive weddings grow in visibility, and as polyamorists seek legal recognition, those assumptions will likewise be weakened. Dismantling amatonormative expectations and unrealistic

[43] Stephens, "A poly wedding."
[44] Warner, "Response," 729.
[45] Stephens, "A poly wedding."

cultural narratives of romantic love is, unsurprisingly, a slow process; but subversive weddings can contribute to it[46].

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Love as an Instrument of Oppression: Plato's Symposium and Contemporary Gender Relations

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Abstract: This paper proposes a re-reading of Plato's *Symposium* through the lens of class theory and materialist feminism. I argue that the speeches contained in the text, and particularly the one delivered by Pausanias, outline a system of social closure designed to pass on privilege between worthy upper-class males in classical Greece, and at the same time to dominate women and keep them in their segregated place in order to exploit their labor for the biological and social reproduction of this class. Within this system, Love (with a capital L) played the role of organizing principle. The way in which love was expected to be offered or withheld structured the reproduction of the society Plato's characters inhabited. I will argue that the result is a system of gender-based oppression that has undergone few essential changes across millennia and that endures under contemporary capitalism. Homoerotic love no longer plays the role of medium for the passing on of privilege and the adjacent domination of women. That territory is now occupied by heterosexual love, with the social attitudes and beliefs attached to it acting directly towards the oppression of women instead. This is done specifically through household and kinship relations. These are imposed on women through various coercive and cultural instruments, with the aim of appropriating their labor to support the production of surplus. Classical Greece upheld a proto-model of what we observe in contemporary configurations. It is important to recognize the constancy of gender oppression predicated on social reproduction in order to develop a gendered counterhistory of capitalism.

Keywords: Plato, social reproduction, exploitation, patriarchy, capitalism

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Introduction

I propose a radical re-reading of certain aspects of Plato's *Symposium*, arguably one of the best-known texts on the nature of love. *The Symposium* is generally interpreted as an analysis of *eros*, or passionate love and desire[1]: this desire is not limited to sex, but, incited by beauty, may have as object not only other people but also food or war. The focus in *Symposium* is primarily on the experience of the one desiring, rather than the reciprocity of feeling that may or may not take place.[2]

The title of the text refers to what was essentially a drinking party for men. In Plato's story, a number of upper-class Greek men come together for a party in 416 BC and decide to eulogize love, and specifically *eros,* that is, to take turns at giving speeches on the wonders of love and how one should go about fulfilling its demands. It must be noted that men belonging to this class led a life of leisure. They did not have to work for a living and were financially comfortable. As a consequence, they valued the loftier realms of wisdom and knowledge, aimed to perfect themselves in their practice, and rather disdained material ambitions.[3]

The question of *eros* involved a consideration of homoeroticism, which was an established practice at the time, mainly in the upper classes. The term cannot be equated with homosexuality, as most of those who indulged in homoeroticism did not have an exclusive preference for partners of the same sex. In fact, most were married to women. However, women, especially in the upper classes, were kept segregated, considered inferior and not worthy of true love, and thus many of the men had simultaneous and often more profound relationships with boys.[4] In these relationships, the older man, the *erastai*, would pursue a young boy chosen for his physical beauty and potential for virtue.[5] Once the boy agreed to enter into a relationship with the older man, he was expected to remain passive and allow himself to be dominated. He would not reciprocate the sexual desire, but may eventually feel *philia*, or a friendly affection, for the older lover, who in turn would take on the shaping of the young boy's character through the passing on of knowledge and wisdom.[6] This is in fact the focus of the symposium described by Plato. Even though the declared objective

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[1] Plato, xi.
[2] Sheffield, 122-123.
[3] Plato, xiii.
[4] Ibid., xv.
[5] Ibid., xvi.
[6] Plato, xvi.

is to think about love in general, the men in Plato's text spend most of their time on the particularities of relationships between grown men and adolescent boys, and specifically the mutually beneficial exchange of "*pederasteia* for *philosophia*".[7] Such relationships were primarily educational in nature and played a specific social function.[8]

In this paper, I will apply class theory and feminist historical materialism to make sense of two of the ways in which love was organized in classical Greece. Of interest is, on the one hand, what Foucault calls the stylization of erotic conduct,[9] or specifically, the aforementioned relations between grown men and boys. To this end, I will pay particular attention to Pausanias' prescriptivist speech in *Symposium*. This speech claims to outline a view of *eros* as a dual phenomenon, consisting of a proper way to love and an improper one. Sheffield maintains that Plato's goal in the text isn't to give an account of interpersonal love, but rather to consider "the desire for good things and happiness".[10] Taking my cue from Sheffield, but departing from her subsequent argument, I will claim that the speech actually describes a system of Weberian social closure designed to pass on privilege within a specific class, the one encompassing free, educated, and wealthy adult males. On the other hand, I will look at the status of women as wives attached to this social class during the same period, and argue that the parallel structure of matrimony, which also relied on mechanisms of social closure, had the goal of reinforcing relations of domination as described in Marxist class theory. To finish, I will integrate the two phenomena to show how their interaction establishes a structure essential for social domination, particularly that of women as reproducers.

Feminist historical materialism, which takes gender differentiation to be a core attribute of a specific historical social formation and focuses on the central category of the gender division of labor, is very useful to this end.[11] I will analyze in conjunction the structure of the relationships of male adults with young boys on the one hand and with women as wives on the other to support my claim that at stake in the way classical Greek society organized love are the class structure and power relations within it, rather than the mere cultural stylization of sexuality with the intention to

[7] Sheffield, 123.
[8] Ibid., 126.
[9] Foucault, 246.
[10] Sheffield, 122.
[11] Young, 102.

constitute what Foucault refers to as "an aesthetics of existence".[12]

In what follows, after a brief overview of class theory from the points of view of Weber and Marx, I will take a detailed look at Plato's text to identify the elements that show how prescriptivism in matters of love was used to organize society and pass on privilege. I will then turn to the condition of women during the same period, and end with a reflection on the continuity to this day of women's oppression predicated on the appropriation of the unwaged 'labor of love' supplied by women.

Class

There are several ways to describe what class is. For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on two. The one put forth by Weber, also referred to as the opportunity-hoarding approach, focuses on institutional aspects and the way in which social positions give some people control over economic resources while excluding others from access to those same resources. The one suggested by Marx and developed by his followers, also called the domination and exploitation approach, looks at the way in which economic positions give some people control over the lives and activities of others.[13]

The central concept in Weberian class theory is that of social closure. It describes the system through which strict requirements are set in place for access to a certain class. These requirements include private property rights, educational credentials, citizenship rights, gender-based restrictions, etc. The advantages of the elites are intrinsically linked to the disadvantages of those excluded. It is thus essential for the exclusion to be guaranteed through some form of institutionalization in order to preserve privilege. Opportunities are therefore hoarded by an elite at the expense of those kept outside its ranks.[14]

Marxist class theory, while recognizing the forces of social closure, is centered on domination and exploitation as ways in which some people control the lives of others. Domination is the ability to control the activities of others, while exploitation means acquiring economic benefits from the labor of those dominated. Exploitation requires domination. In other words,

[12] Foucault, 92.
[13] Wright, 3.
[14] Ibid., 6.

Marxist theory goes beyond the Weberian preoccupation with restricted access. It adds to it the important dimension of control over the labor of another to one's own advantage as a key element of class structure. The focus is on structured inequality that is constituted through the cooperation between exploiters and exploited as well as dominators and dominated.[15]

The two approaches are complementary in describing the reality of class generated by their interaction and particularly the importance of power and social rules. Opportunity hoarding works to reinforce exclusion for purposes of sustaining and reproducing privilege in the way adolescent boys in classical Greece went on to enjoy in adulthood the knowledge and social protection offered by their former sexual partners and, by extension, mentors. Through mechanisms of supervision, monitoring, and sanctions used to enforce what was ultimately labor discipline, exploitation and domination maintained the fundamental division between upper-class Greek males as holders of privilege, specifically economic power buttressed by exclusive juridical and political rights, and females as key social reproducers of this privilege. As we will see below, the basis of this dynamics was the strict segregation and ultimate isolation of women, as well as the fact that they were prevented from owning property.[16]

The party

As mentioned above, the task proposed by the host, Agathon, to the men attending his party was to produce a eulogy of *eros*. Although he is not the first speaker, Pausanias begins his speech by redefining the topic of the symposium.[17] His central claim is that love needs to be regulated before it is able to achieve its aim. For Pausanias, love done properly brings order to the world, rather than merely producing pleasure or fulfilling a fleeting need. He takes issue with the request to praise Love without qualification, and continues by making a distinction between two types of love, Common and Celestial. The two types of love are said to have two different domains. One ensures that love is done properly, and one doesn't. One type of love, Celestial Love, merits praise, and the other, Common Love, merits disdain.[18] Pausanias repeatedly emphasizes the fact that there

[15] Wright, 9.
[16] As were most other inhabitants of Athens. However, this paper only deals with the specific interaction of propertied men and the women of the same class.
[17] Plato, 180d.
[18] Plato, 181a-c.

is a proper way to do things and an improper one, and that the difference between the two should be the focus of any consideration of love.

Not surprisingly, in Pausanias' description Common Love is experienced by ordinary people. Such people are not sufficiently discerning, because they love both women and boys and do so for the body and not the mind. Their goal is merely to satisfy their desires, without care for whether this is done properly. On the other hand, Celestial Love gives rise to affection for strength and intelligence, which, in Pausanias' view, are attributes reserved to the male.[19] This is, Pausanias underlines, the only proper way to love.[20] The outline of a system of social closure already takes shape, marked by what is arbitrarily seen as acceptable, or proper, behavior, and what is not.

Even among those who love boys, only some are truly inspired by Celestial Love. This further distinction depends on the boy's age.[21] Pausanias feels a restriction in this regard is essential to ensure a lasting relationship rather than a fleeting one that fools the boy and provides him with no long-term advantages. From the older man's point of view, a relationship with a boy is an investment, so it is necessary for a man to choose his young lover based on the latter's likelihood of turning out well. In other words, the boy should not be too young, but rather old enough to make possible the assessment of budding qualities.[22] Pausanias even calls for a rule to be formulated and imposed in this regard, which he compares to methods used to prevent liaisons with women.[23] This type of prevention, as we will see below, isn't merely a question of style, but it is also essential for consolidating women's oppression for purposes of protecting male privilege.

Pausanias proves he is aware of the power of love to organize societies. He shows how love, necessarily between two men, underlies organized resistance, and he refers to the loyalty and friendship it gives rise to as something that tyrants see as a threat to their power.[24] He makes historical references to Athenian tyrants toppled by the collaboration between two lovers, and to the fact that Ionians and other peoples in the Persian empire, ruled by tyrants, qualify love, or rather the gratification of a lover, as wrong, because it isn't in the interest of those holding power

[19] Ibid., 181c.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid., 181d.
[22] Ibid., 181e.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., 182c.

to allow such closeness between men to lead to counter-forces arising and organizing.[25]

The essence of the relationship between a boy and his lover is not intended to be unequal, the way it is between a man and his future wife. The boyfriend is expected to evolve to a status/virtue equal to that of his lover, through learning and being guided by the latter.[26] As a consequence, courtship is also subject to strict rules meant to test the prospective lover.[27] Here too, Pausanias confirms his prescriptivist impulses.

Most of Pausanias' speech revolves around the distinction between what constitutes a good or a bad relationship. The focus is on the nature of the lover, which in turn will dictate the nature, and, crucially, the outcome, of the relationship. If the lover is of the common type, he is not suitable. He loves the body at the expense of the mind, and thus isn't constant, and, implicitly, not a solid investment for the future. In other words, he will not become the kind of mentor and life-long protector a young boy needs as he advances through society and life. Conversely, a lover is good, and hence the relationship is good, if he appreciates character and is thus likely to be constant in his presence, facilitating the boy's intellectual and social progress well beyond the end of the love relationship. In fact, society has put in place tests to establish the worth of lovers, by encouraging them to prove their commitment and inclination towards constancy.[28] They are expected to chase the boys, and the boys to run away and keep up the ritual until character is revealed satisfactorily. Immediate submission is penalized and shamed. These rules are imposed by convention and moral codes. There are also rules applying to the boy. Only one type of lover gratification is good, and that is the one that aims at some sort of personal improvement, such as, for example, increasing knowledge. Mere pleasure is not considered a sufficient reason to yield to a lover, but neither are the lover's money or political success, as they are bound to be ephemeral.[29]

Pausanias places great emphasis on the capacity of rules, and of compliance with them, to lead to a good relationship and allow grown man and young boy to avoid ending up in a relationship that is bad, in its outcome or promise for the future, for one of them, or for both. However, it doesn't follow from Pausanias' speech that a relationship can be simultaneously bad

[25] Plato, 182c.
[26] Ibid., 183e.
[27] Ibid., 183e-184a.
[28] Ibid., 183c-e.
[29] Ibid., 184a.

for both those involved. If the lover fails to follow the moral code, for example by being inconstant in his choices, then the boyfriend loses, because he has missed the opportunity to have an older man's protection once he becomes an adult and must navigate society and gain status and a position on his own. If the boyfriend flaunts convention, then the lover has invested in a boy who fails to become a worthy man and take forth his legacy.[30] Thus, Pausanias outlines a system of passing on advantages, status, and hence privilege that focuses on the nature of the participants but from the point of view of their capacity to follow the rules of the game, much in the vein of Weber's theory of class. Ultimately, love in Pausanias understanding is a transaction. An exchange of worthy goods for the mutual benefit of the two men involved.[31]

There are echoes of similar preoccupations in the other speeches as well. For example, Phaedrus claims that the "greatest benefit" that a young man can encounter in his youth is that of a "virtuous lover" to guide him through life,[32] thus again emphasizing the importance of a love relationship between equals as a way to order society and ultimately pass on status. Equality here refers to potential and likely outcome, rather than point of departure. Women could never achieve the same level of virtue and depth of wisdom as men. Their bodies were considered to be "fundamentally different and inferior to men's", particularly due to their reproductive function, which in turn was considered the main influence on their "physical and mental disposition".[33] A bit further, Phaedrus goes on to claim that this man-boy relationship is a source of power and moral cross-check, allowing men united in one to "conquer the whole world" while also "competing with one another in avoiding any kind of shameful act".[34] He closes by underlining that a boy's surrender is rewarded by the appreciation of the gods, arguably the highest of praises.[35]

Eryximachus, speaking as a practitioner of the art of medicine, remarks that he has noticed how love pervades "every aspect of the lives of men and gods".[36] In other words, here, too, love is a structural element. Eryximachus echoes Pausanias' view on the rightness of gratifying good people and the wrongness of gratifying bad people, and extends it to body parts, classifying them

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[30] Plato, 184b.
[31] Ibid., 184c-d.
[32] Ibid., 178c.
[33] Hong, 72.
[34] Plato, 178e.
[35] Ibid., 180a-b.
[36] Ibid., 186b.

into good, i.e. healthy, and bad, i.e., diseased, and thus worthy and not worthy, respectively, of being gratified.[37] Moderation, as manifested in virtue, restraint, and moral behavior, is good, and the province of Celestial Love, and should be passed on to others and reproduced, while self-indulgence is not good, and is governed by Common Love.[38] By insisting on defining goodness and emphasizing the need for it to be reproduced at the expense of badness within the strict confinements of that definition, both Pausanias and Eryximachus are in fact aiming for the reproduction of their own types, that is, their own class, and the suppression of any other sort of profiles as inferior and thus destined to be dominated and controlled.

Aristophanes expands the list of virtues to include manliness. It is the very manly boys that stand out already in childhood who later on will be attracted to other men, rather than women, and who will prove their qualities as adults. Interestingly, the way this proof will come about is that "they [will be] the only men who end up in government".[39] This is because homoeroticism and politics were mainly upper-class preoccupations.[40] But, also, those engaging in homoerotic relationships were the only ones to end up in government because relationships with older men were elements of the system through which positions were passed on.

Agathon, too, sees love as a vehicle of peace in society, or, in other words, as an organizing principle that brings order to chaos by neutralizing necessity, the source of all that was bad. To support his claim, he gives the example of the "castration and imprisonment" that were typical for the deeds of the gods, and adds that those could never have taken place had they been guided by Love.[41] Agathon's speech is the one that formulates in most detail the clear bias for youth that Love is expected to manifest.[42] This furthers the argument that love is a signpost for societal organization. Love is expected to choose the young as his preferred medium, and thus fulfil his role of bridge and relay between generations.

Diotima, in Socrates' retelling, demotes Love from the status of god to that of spirit, underlining his nature of mediator between the perfection of gods and the imperfection of humans, combining the characteristics of his two parents, Plenty and Poverty, and situates him between

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[37] Plato, 186c.
[38] Ibid., 187d-e.
[39] Ibid., 192a.
[40] Ibid., note to 192a, 81.
[41] Ibid., 195c.
[42] Ibid., 195b, 196b.

wisdom and ignorance.[43] Diotima narrows the focus of the previous speeches to the question of reproduction. She claims the only purpose of love is "physical and mental procreation in an attractive medium".[44] Procreation is the path to immortality, which allows the "permanent possession of goodness".[45] Women are acknowledged as playing a role in this arrangement, but an inferior one. Women produce children, albeit their role is merely that of vessels. However, human children are an imperfect path to immortality. They are far less fulfilling than mental procreation, and indeed fame and status, which remain the province of men.[46] Men looking for mental procreation will choose a beautiful and virtuous mind to help them release their mental pregnancy. This mind is necessarily male, since women were not viewed in 5th century BC Greece as able practitioners of intellectual pursuits. A woman could have neither wisdom, nor virtue, and thus could never be the vehicle towards *eudaimonia* (happiness in the Aristotelian sense), which is the highest pursuit in life.[47] And, once this fellow virtuous mind has been identified and settled upon, the mentally pregnant man will "take on this person's education".[48] This relationship is, in Diotima's view, far more powerful and stable than one between people who share only "ordinary children", in other words, between a man and a woman.[49] Human children are, in general, less desirable than children of the mind, as the latter are more effective vehicles of immortality.[50] In other words, precedence is given to wisdom and knowledge as carriers of value and elements establishing class distinction, to the expense of children and the women who give them life.

Alcibiades' speech comes as a counterpoint to the previous speakers and the loftiness of their preoccupations. He isn't concerned with the Form, he is concerned with a specific person, Socrates, and the ambiguity of his very concrete feelings for him. In line with his biography, Alcibiades wishes to undermine the society he has been dealt while at the same time finding a way to exist within it.[51]

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[43] Plato, 203b-204b.
[44] Ibid., 206b.
[45] Ibid., 207a.
[46] Ibid., 208d-209a.
[47] Sheffield, 128.
[48] Plato, 209c.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid., 209d, 212b.
[51] For an in-depth discussion of Alcibiades' speech, see Nussbaum.

Wives

This brings us to the question of women. Athenian women in the 5th and 6th century BC, particularly married ones, had property rights that were markedly inferior to those of men, facilitating their domination and oppression, as well as that of their children.[52] This likely sprung from the monopoly on gestation held by women, and the resulting need to control them as the sole source of offspring. From this point of view, Athenian women, exploited for their biological and social reproductive labor, constituted a distinct economic class in the Marxian sense. This applied in particular to upper-class women, whose men owned significant property to which the women had no rights. In this way, the gap between the sexes in the upper classes was larger than in the case of, for example, peasants.[53]

This arrangement resulted in the oppression of women. Women had to stay at home and tend the house and were kept out of the public eye, more so in the upper classes, which had enough space to segregate their women more effectively and there was no need for the women to work outside the home.[54] They produced goods, whether material, sexual, or affective, within the strict confinement of their juridical and social status, which were then necessarily appropriated by their men, since they were the only ones allowed property. Wives were only permitted to have sexual relations with their husband. They remained under his power, as did any children they produced. The duty of wives was limited to household tasks.[55] Husbands were expected to keep up a certain frequency in sexual relations with their wives, but exclusivity was not essential. Only the wife had to remain faithful, because it was important to make sure paternity was certain and heirs legitimate. Marriage in general did not seem to pose questions requiring the structuring of the man's pleasure, sexual or otherwise.[56] It was primarily a question of house, household, and relations of production, particularly insofar as it concerned the woman.[57]

The husband's responsibility included the exercise of a paternal role for his wife. Given that wives were often very young, their husbands, sometimes twice their age, provided them with

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[52] De Ste. Croix, 100.
[53] Ibid., 101.
[54] Plato, xv.
[55] Foucault, 145.
[56] Ibid., 147.
[57] Foucault, 151.

the education necessary to tend to matters of household management as well as general conduct.[58] As Foucault points out, citing Xenophon, a marriage was not primarily a relationship between a man and a woman who also happen to maintain a house and a family, but rather a structure within which the husband carried a "governmental responsibility" and the woman was expected to assimilate his teachings and perform according to expectations. The focus was not on love or pleasure, but the "reasonable practice of economy".[59]

The marriage bond was characterized by asymmetry. Ischomachus, cited by Foucault, describes the start of the marriage as a matter of negotiation between the future husband and the future wife's parents. The main criterion is the girl's suitability as a household manager and producer of children.[60] While there is emphasis on the fact that the roles of the two partners are complementary, i.e., the husband provides and sources externally while the woman preserves and manages internally, the relationship remains asymmetric because it is still the husband who appropriates the wife's work, while the wife provides her services in exchange for livelihood and status with limited agency. The authority of the gods is called upon to legitimize this division as well as to make it binding. Any deviation or inversion of roles is announced as a danger to the "good order of the household" and thus its success.[61]

Ischomachus' wife is concerned with ways to remain attractive to her husband through the years, without him reciprocating with similar preoccupations, which testifies to the unequal relationship between the two. The wife worries about being replaced with someone younger and tries to prevent it from happening by attempting to improve herself as a sexual object.[62] This choice reveals her understanding of where her worth lies. Her husband, however, underlines her importance as a household manager. He promises that, as long as she does that job well, and remains active in ways specific to the home, she will remain attractive and, implicitly, not lose her privileges.[63] At no point is sexual exclusivity on the part of the husband even considered, which is also why the young wife needs to understand that the locus of her worth is not her sexual

[58] Ibid., 155.
[59] Ibid., 155.
[60] Ibid., 156.
[61] Ibid., 159.
[62] Ibid., 160.
[63] Foucault, 162.

attractiveness.[64] In other words, that even if she were to hold sway over her husband by means of her beauty, this will not ensure her status and privilege over other women, since her true role within the couple is to ensure social reproduction. This lesson, in which her husband takes pride, is part of the young wife's education, and serves to further structure the matrimonial relationship to the end for which it exists, that is, the economic partnership intended strictly to maintain and grow wealth as well as produce children.

When reciprocal sexual fidelity is considered, it is not because of affection, but due to the interests of the state and of lineage. Ensuring one's children can claim that lineage by having the same mother and the same father and being the products of a lawful union preserves status and in turn maintains the stability of the state.[65] It is not a sign of improvement of the status of women or an acceptance of any claim to recognition beyond the confines of their assigned roles.

Love?

Considering the organization of love in the classical period of Greece through a materialist lens helps uncover the way in which gender division was key for structuring society throughout history and served as a "pivotal element in most systems of social domination".[66] As shown above, one goal of the system described was the appropriation of women's labor by barring women from sharing into the privileges enjoyed by men. Valuing relations with young males over relations with females was an added layer to the key objective of keeping women in an oppressed position and away from public matters, rather than merely a discerning belief in the quality of the fulfillment provided by one or the other.

This seems to indicate the existence of a dual system, constituted by male domination, or what is sometimes called patriarchy, on the one hand, and mode of reproduction as locus of exploitation, on the other. The two appear as distinct, but in fact arise from the same set of social relations, as their shared goal is to ensure the social reproduction of a specific class. In the transition to capitalism, the segregation of social life into public, productive sphere, belonging to men, and domestic, reproductive sphere, assigned to women, similarly relied on devaluing

[64] Ibid., 163.
[65] Ibid., 170-171.
[66] Young, 102.

women's bodies and work. This was crucial for consolidating wage dependency and the spread of capitalist relations.[67]

In her classic work on witch-hunts in medieval Europe, Silvia Federici provides a solid analysis of how difference was constructed during the transition to capitalism and how it was used to devalue the work of women in order to facilitate their exploitation. This exploitation, in turn, was one of the essential sources of surplus leading to the consolidation of capital. Faced with the crisis of feudalism, the European elite took various paths towards appropriating new types of wealth sources to extend its economic base, founding capitalism in the process.[68] One of these paths, in conjunction with the privatization of land, meant appropriating the labor of women. Federici shows how the global proletariat was formed through taking control of women as reproducers of the work force, primarily by destroying their power and capacity for independent sustenance. The attack on women was launched by restructuring the rule of the patriarchy by means of waged labor and separating production from reproduction. Women became unable to support themselves, as their work was increasingly devalued. Only items produced for the market were viewed as carrying value, while reproductive work was paid at the lowest possible level, or went mostly unpaid.[69]

Due of the population decline of the 16th-17th century and the mercantilist belief that the larger the population the more wealth could be accrued, efforts by the state to discipline the female body and to take control of the reproductive function increased. Women who were found guilty of reproductive crimes were punished severely. This also led to the loss of knowledge and control women held collectively when it came to conception, gestation, and birth. It was during the same period that midwives were pushed out of birthing rooms and replaced by male doctors.[70] As a consequence, women entirely lost control over their wombs, which became tools serving capitalist accumulation.[71] Women were thus pushed out of the sphere of productive work. Motherhood was imposed on them, along with related social reproductive undertakings, and they were exploited for minimal wages as home producers.[72]

The creation of the housewife, fully in place by the 19th century, sealed the nature of

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[67] Mohandesi and Teitelman, 42-43.
[68] Federici, 99.
[69] Ibid., 108.
[70] Ibid., 144.
[71] Ibid., 145.
[72] Federici, 155.

relations between the genders and the fact that women were barred from access to a wage allowing them to survive independently, except as prostitutes.[73] By excluding them from waged labor, the subordination of women to men, and their loss of control over their bodies, was completed.[74]

The deep divisions within the working class created and reinforced as capitalism became established, and particularly those between women and men, remain to this day the basis of capitalist accumulation and the resulting injustice and exploitation.[75] Under the current capitalist order, predicated on the production of surplus and on accumulation, this same distinction is maintained in precisely the same way, by separating social life into the spheres of productive activity, the realm reserved to men and/or male authority, and household and kinship relations, generally imposed on women through various coercive and cultural instruments, including love, and requiring the appropriation of their labor to support the production of surplus.[76]

In that sense, what Pausanias extols and Foucault and de Ste. Croix describe in detail for classical Greece is a proto-model of what we observe in contemporary configurations. In the absence of accumulation and surplus as organizing principles, it was love and the regulation of love that successfully filled the same role in upper-class Athenian society. In other words, the system of social reproduction was secured by closely defining acceptable behavior and what was morally appropriate and what wasn't in the practices of love. As such, privilege and societal control were inextricably connected. They formed, in fact, a unitary system.[77]

The essence of social reproduction has thus endured virtually unchanged into our era. Gender continues to act as a dividing line, despite sustained efforts by successive generations of activists and theorists alike towards bridging the gaps it generates. Women continue to be biological reproducers, which means their monopoly on gestation remains at the core of their oppression. They also represent the majority of social reproducers.[78] Much of reproductive labor continues to be unwaged and is thus the site of particularly harsh forms of exploitation. This exploitation is still made possible by a structure of gender-based domination. As such, the exploitation of reproductive labor remains at the core of capitalist accumulation.[79] The extent of

[73] Ibid., 120-121.
[74] Ibid., 159.
[75] Ibid., 102.
[76] Young, 101.
[77] Ibid., 97.
[78] Fraser, 28.
[79] Ibid., 23.

this gendered exploitation varies with class and race, but nevertheless remains a constant presence in the lives of contemporary women.[80] Reproductive labor, a condition of possibility for any society and still separated in a gendered domestic sphere, continues to be cast in moral terms and as a question of virtue and love.[81] Love of the homoerotic kind is no longer the medium through which privilege is passed on, but has endured in its heterosexual iteration as the imperative that helps ensure women comply with being the main reproducers of the ultimate capitalist commodity, the labor force.

However, reproduction has also been a key site of feminist struggles and continued resistance to oppression. The inability to reproduce themselves socially due to exploitation at the site of production has brought women, and men, out onto the streets with a variety of demands, for example for better pay and better work conditions, for equal redistribution of wealth, or for affordable public services. They have pressured the capitalist machine of accumulation in order to put a brake on its advancement at their expense. In fact, the social reproduction of its labor force is capital's greatest expenditure. It is, therefore, important to recognize the constancy of gender oppression predicated on social reproduction as it forces us to reconsider the history of capitalism from the point of view of social reproduction, rather than, as hitherto, only for what concerns struggles at the point of production.[82]

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[80] Fraser, 31.
[81] Ibid., 23.
[82] Mohandesi and Teitelman, 38.

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Love, Neuro-Parenting and Autism: from Individual to Collective Responsibility towards Parents and Children

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Abstract: That parents should love their children is generally considered self-evident. But what this love should entail is still a topic of discussion. In this paper, we demonstrate that there is currently a trend towards biologizing and even neurologizing parental love - that is, the claim that loving parental relationships are required for the brain development of the child - and that this trend has important repercussions for how we conceive of responsibility for children. Parental love, we will argue, is increasingly being conceptualized in reductionist biological and neurological terms. For example, parenting experts often stress the importance of loving parental relationships for the healthy brain development of the child. Moreover, this trend affects mothers and fathers differently. We will demonstrate this by, firstly, looking into the brain-based parenting discourse in general and secondly, by reviewing the discussion surrounding the diagnosis of autism in particular. We will use the arguments of Jan Macvarish regarding neuro-parenting to demonstrate that parental love is increasingly thought of in reductionist biological and neurological terms. Here, we will discuss three issues. Firstly, we will look at how the neuro-parenting discourse primarily focuses on mothers and their responsibilities. Secondly, we will show how the current discourse on parental love defers child-raising to the realm of individual rather than collective responsibility. Thirdly, we will analyse the discourse on the biological effects of love insofar as it suggests that parents have a duty to love, since their attachment and commitment are deemed biologically necessary for the child's healthy development. Later on, we use our own qualitative research on how clinicians and parents experience a child's autism diagnosis to further demonstrate the complex relationship between neuro-discourse and responsibility. When parents are confronted with a diagnosis of autism in their child, seeking the advice of experts in neurodevelopmental

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disorders is seen as the obvious path for developing their parental love. The neurodevelopmental diagnosis of autism has an exculpatory effect that might be necessary to safeguard parental love, as it relieves parents of some of the responsibility they feel for the child's challenging behavior. We will demonstrate that parents are considered to have a duty to know a child's neurological status and a responsibility to act upon this status. Finally, we will point out the relevance of gender for autism and neuro-parenting. We conclude that research into the biology of parental love is a worthwhile endeavor, but that such work requires a less simplistic view of biology than is currently the case. In the current climate regarding the parents' (and specifically mothers') duty to love their children in a particular way, we will make a case in this paper for liberating both mothers and fathers from fixed parental roles. We will conclude by arguing for more collective responsibility to lovingly raise children.

Keywords: parental love, mother, father, autism, responsibility

Introduction

In their book *Neuro. The New Brain Sciences and the Management of the Mind*, Nikolas Rose and Joelle Abi-Rached have described how brain sciences are influencing our understanding and management of human behavior as never before: the brain is increasingly considered to be what makes human beings human. Today, the individual brain has become the *target* in the aspiration to shape and improve oneself (Rose and Abi-Rached 2013). But in contrast with the argument that in neuroscience "determinism still reigns" (Gazzaniga 2011 in Sankey & Kim in (Joldersma 2016)), Rose and Abi-Rachid claim that such *neurologizing* does not mean that we are determined by our neurobiology. With the discourse about brains and plasticity, human beings are encouraged even more to assume responsibility for their own brain and to improve themselves by understanding and acting on their brain (Rose and Abi-Rached 2013). This call and the associated urge to improve our neurology are especially apparent in the discourse about parental love and parental responsibilities.

The love of a parent for her child is often taken to be the most self-evident type of love in the Western world (Bretherton 2013). However, the way in which parental love is perceived is

dependent on time and context. In Western societies today, parents are expected to carry out spontaneously particular acts of love and care-taking, singing, playing, counting, cuddling, relaxing, or reading, and raising children is said to be the most vital of human tasks (Macvarish 2016). In other times and places, people have expressed and understood parental love in very different ways. For example, until some decades ago, Western infants were not that intensively mothered (Faircloth 2017). In some non-Westernised societies such as Ghana, a mother still rarely holds her infant facing her and rarely talks to her (Lancy 2007).

There are also cultural and historical differences as regards the role that gender plays in parenting. Today, the role of the mother continues to be given greater attention than the role of fathers, let alone other types of family carers. For example, John Bowlby, the founder of attachment theory, argued that babies are naturally desirous of maternal care and that mothers are naturally equipped to deliver it (Bowlby 1969; Macvarish 2016). However, the emphasis on the role of the mother cannot be generalized throughout time. In the Western world during the early modern period, the child's socialization and education were the father's responsibility, while a woman was merely expected to run the household (Furedi 2001, 2008). Maternal nurture only became viewed as 'natural' in the nineteenth century (Gillis 1996). At this time, the theory of evolution was increasingly understood to give a biological explanation for the development of human society (Burman 2008; Macvarish, 2016). Maternal nurture of children, from an evolutionary perspective, was becoming 'naturalized'. It was considered to be an essential and biological part of what it means to be a woman (Badinter 1981). In this way, evolutionary theory contributed to the current, deeply embedded ideology regarding the proper ('natural') role of women; cultural beliefs about the naturalness of maternal instinct, natural mother love and exclusive motherhood have become deep-seated, although they are fairly recent (Wall 2001). Hence, the current parental love discourse can largely be equated to a discourse on motherly love[1,2]. Indeed, in most literature on parental care that does not take *fathers* as its explicit target, it

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[1] At the same time, while affirming the - so-called 'naturally' - disproportionate mother's share in parenting, current Western understandings of parenting (mothering) carry a strong child-centered focus (Wall 2001). The rights and responsibilities of mothers have been defined increasingly in terms of the child's interests. Moreover, the mother is expected to put aside her own needs in order to accommodate the child's needs (Macvarish 2016; Richardson 2014).

[2] Accordingly, in cultures around the world, *care in general* is currently being viewed overwhelmingly through a gendered lens: care is seen as women's work – although men have recently made some inroads into this area (Tronto 2013).

is *mothers* whose responsibilities and attributions are discussed (Kasovac, WAIMH congress, 2018)[3].

Neuro-parenting

We start our actual argument on biological interpretations of parental love with a historical situation and definition of neuro-parenting, as described by Jan Macvarish in her book *Neuroparenting. The Expert Invasion of Family Life*. The societal focus on children and on parenting has a history of some 150 years, and the view on parental love in Western culture has been profoundly shaped by the 'child saving movement' in the late 19th century. This movement was intended to mitigate the roots of child delinquency and change the treatment of juveniles under the justice system with the aim of social 'amelioration' and the prevention of social disorder (Macvarish 2016). Consecutively, this view was shaped by developmental psychology from the 1950s onward (Burman 2008) and by neuroscience from the 1990s on (Macvarish 2016). At the family and policy level, the character formation of the child became a source of anxiety, as suboptimal practices were thought to lead to badly behaved and delinquent children. But children are also increasingly depicted as a source of hope, as Cunningham states: "we are constantly reminded that children are the future" (Cunningham 2012). As a consequence, in recent years, the quality and quantity of parental love and care are being *scrutinized* by developmental psychology and neuroscience, which are combined in what Jan Macvarish has called *neuro-parenting* (Burman 2008). Macvarish summarizes the requirements of *neuro-parenting* as follows: the parent should try to emotionally 'attune' herself to her baby, already starting in utero. The parent should follow the child's lead in attuning herself with the child and is expected to respond continually to the visual and auditory cues of the infant. And the child's development process requires active, conscious and educated nurturing. This is required to optimize the child's neurological development (Macvarish 2016; Newman, Sivaratnam, and Komiti 2015). This advice is backed up by scientific claims. For example, it has been argued that children whose parents speak less to

[3] However, a review of six empirical studies suggests that the influence of *paternal* love on a child's social, emotional and cognitive development is as great as, and occasionally greater than, the influence of *maternal* love: paternal love appears to be as heavily implicated as maternal love in a child's psychological wellbeing (Rohner and Veneziano 2001).

them during a critical period in brain development will lag behind on language tests by up to six months at age two (Sample 2014). In Western society, such neuro-parenting discourse necessarily and profoundly shapes the parent-child bond. Macvarish suggests that intuitive, spontaneous and transgenerationally transmitted parental expertise and confidence become less valued, as neuro-parenting experts promise to make the quality and quantity of parental love not only measurable, but more importantly, improvable. In order to do so, parents must seek help and advice from neuroscience in order to improve their parenting (Macvarish 2016).

Although there are certainly benefits to a scientific and neurological understanding of the effects of parental love, such discourse also entails several dangers, such as a risk that it encourages unequal distribution of parental responsibilities. In the following sections, we will discuss three issues in neuro-parenting: (a) gender; (b) parenting politicized; and (c) a duty to love.

Gender in neuro-parenting

The neuro-parenting discourse reinforces the idea that the bulk of parental responsibility lies with the mother. While using the gender-neutral term of neuro-*parenting*, Macvarish underscores the discipline's particular focus on *mothers*. She describes how neuro-parenting encourages a particular way of raising children that is intensive ("doing more and doing it earlier") and anxious. Mothers in particular are placed under considerable pressure to conform to this new idea of parenting (Macvarish, 2016). Parents' child-raising practice is scrutinized from the outside, by so-called parenting experts, but also from within. Parents (especially mothers) are expected to become educated 'experts' themselves by appropriating the scientific discourse surrounding parenting. Not following the rules in force on child-rearing practice is almost immoral, as parents are then made to feel that they would risk causing developmental and brain impairments in their child (Macvarish 2016). Indeed, the *individual* love between parent (mother) and child is sometimes considered to be responsible for the child's cognitive and socio-emotional development, as more and more evidence regarding the molecular and neurological effects of deprivation of love is uncovered (Hens 2017). Hence, the need for love in the relationship between parent and child is considered self-evident, and important for healthy neurological development. But love alone is not found sufficient to help the child become a psychologically and neurologically healthy adult. Since there appears to be little faith in the so-called 'maternal instinct', a fundamental characteristic of neuro-

parenting is that the 'natural' needs of the human infant cannot be reliably met by their parents and their communities without special training (Suissa 2017). Neuro-parenting makes parental expertise less trustworthy than the expertise of the parenting expert (Macvarish 2016). For example, in one of the theoretical pillars of neuro-parenting, *attachment theory*, some 'maternal instinct' is considered evident, while at the same time the theory conveys the duty to offer specifically 'sensitive' maternal care in order to bring the next generation to healthy adulthood (Ainsworth 1972 in Bretherton 2013). Therefore, according to the tenets of this theory on relational-emotional development, mothering is understood to be too difficult to be left to mothers without expert advice. Moreover, in the 1980s, one decade after the attachment theory was formulated, a warning against the use of day care was issued, as this would endanger "the affective ties within the family" (Quinn 1982). With hindsight, this warning has to be seen in relation to the background of major societal changes at that time in the position between the sexes. For example, the popular US pediatrician Berry Brazelton seemed to almost 'market' the baby to the mother in order to try to put motherhood on a par with a professional career when it comes to stimulation and status: "We must be careful to provide environmental supports that reinforce the strength and rewards of reciprocal affective ties within the family!" (Macvarish 2016; Brazelton 1988). It is undeniable that such talk about the need for tight affective bonds between the baby and her family affects primarily the mother, who is given the choice between giving up a career or giving up the optimal neurological development of her child.

Parenting politicized

The scientific account of parenting has led to an instrumentalization of love: love is no longer valued purely for itself, but as a way of improving the brain of one's child. Moreover, this may promote the view that parents are responsible for creating a certain kind of child, one that is a good fit within a given society (Suissa 2017). Macvarish therefore warns against expert advice instrumentalizing love and care within the family: the ultimate goal might not be to create healthier children, but to create better citizens out of children (Macvarish 2016). In this respect, Joan Tronto discusses how in a neoliberal society being productive and being financially independent are valued most (Tronto 2013). But this goal can be different from what parents want for their child. Some parents, for example, say they attribute more importance to the child's well-being than high-

status careers, although they seem to appropriate the discourse in which the child's educational achievement and independency are seen as measures of success - as a 'good citizen' (Hodge 2006; Jacobs et al. under review).

Also, the possibility that parental love is deficient is extended from extreme problem cases (for example, children placed in a succession of foster homes) to all family situations (Macvarish 2016). As such, moral and social problems are biologized. That is, the cause of - and the solution to - the problems of deprivation in underprivileged families are located within the parental nurture of the children's brain: the responsibility for this deprivation is individualized as poor-quality parenting. Macvarish therefore argues that neuro-parenting is politicized: "the idea of a parenting deficit has taken hold of policy-makers' imaginations, and parent training has become increasingly normalized through new institutional structures and government programmes" (Macvarish 2016). In this respect, sociologists Rose and Abi-Rached argue that within these programmes the child is governed through the family in order to reduce social ills like criminal and antisocial behaviors[4]. They add: "Social justice lies not in tackling the causes of structural inequality, poverty, poor housing, unemployment, but in managing parents in the name of the formation of good citizens" (Rose and Abi-Rached 2013). Likewise, philosopher of education Judith Suissa shows that many British politicians repeatedly declared that 'feckless parents' and a lack of discipline in the home (and children's faulty character because of these) are the main reasons behind anti-social behavior: bad parenting is at the root of our social problems (Suissa 2017; Lexmond et al. 2011). Thus, the current discourse on parental love is being politically phrased with the effect of deferring child-rearing to the realm of individual (and more specifically parental) responsibility. But in doing so, the question of the extent to which there is a collective responsibility to enable better parenting environments is being sidestepped.

A duty to love

The current discourse about the biological effects of love suggests that parents have a duty to love, since their attachment and commitment are shown to be biologically necessary for the child's healthy development. As such, the duty to love one's children becomes equivalent with the

[4] These goals are very similar to the 'child saving movement' in the late 19th century, see above.

duty to clothe and feed them, as a direct route to wellbeing. But Macvarish warns that "neuro-parenting instrumentalizes the everyday acts of love that parents spontaneously carry out - talking, singing, playing, counting, cuddling, relaxing, reading - not because they want to build their baby's brain, but because they find them intrinsically rewarding". She adds that neuro-parenting advice has the potential to interfere with the "intimate practices, rituals and pleasures of family life" (Macvarish 2016). Indeed, a scientific discourse on the biology both of the parental love – operationalized as the parent-child relationship - and of the effect of a particular kind of love on the child's health, has the effect of transforming parental love into a duty. The philosophical debate on the duty to love has a long history. In 1797, Kant wrote: "Love is a matter of feeling, not of willing, and I cannot love because I will to, still less because I ought to (I cannot be constrained to love); so a duty to love is an absurdity." (Kant 1996). More recently however, philosopher Matthew Liao argues that duty and love are compatible, because being motivated for the sake of duty and being motivated for the sake of the other person are not necessarily distinct (Liao 2006). Philosopher Lotte Spreeuwenberg claims that such a duty feels "chilly" and that love is generally experienced as a slippery and uncontrollable phenomenon. From a moral point of view, she argues, only a duty *to try* to love appears to make sense, while a mother cannot be held accountable for not loving her child (Spreeuwenberg 2017). However, within attachment theory, in stressing the essential role of maternal sensitivity in a child's development, Mary Ainsworth considered maternal delight in the baby - and the capacity to express it verbally - to be a vital aspect. So, in her influential view on the parent-child relationship, the (verbalized) delight of the mother in the child is argued to be necessary in a child's development (Bretherton 2013; Bell and Ainsworth 1972). It is arguably incompatible to *not* love a child and yet to experience delight in her, so she appears to be claiming that parents have a duty to love their child. In the same vein, Joan Tronto argues that people currently experience a lot of pressure and uncertainty due to an overload of responsibilities - in this case a duty, especially for mothers, to love their child in a particular way. The result of this pressure and uncertainty, she continues, is that people simplify things by judging and blaming individuals if something goes wrong: "it's your own fault". Tronto claims that the simplistic conviction of attributing all responsibility of care (for a child in this case) to a single individual (the parent or mother in this case) could be countered by viewing care as a collective rather than an individual responsibility (Tronto 2013). We will come back to this later.

In summary, we have shown that parenting experts currently base their authoritative advice to parents on biological and neurological research findings about the parent-child relationship. This has three effects. First, mothers are primarily targeted (and possibly negatively affected) by the neuro-parenting discourse. Second, the neuro-parenting discourse appears to be made use of in politics in order to justify a focus on the individual responsibility of parents for raising their children rather than a collective responsibility to create an enabling environment for loving families. Third, this neurologized parental love is presented to parents by parenting experts as constituting a duty to love one's child: parental love is considered to be necessary for the child's health. More specifically, a particular kind of parental love is deemed necessary: active, conscious and educated love (Macvarish 2016).

Neurologizing parental love: autism and parental responsibility

In the above, we described the concept of neuro-parenting as an illustration of *neurologizing parental love*. In the following, we apply this to the discourse surrounding autism. We discuss our own qualitative research in order to illustrate the influence of the neuro-parenting discourse on the use of the diagnosis of autism.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is generally understood as a developmental disorder which is predominantly neurologically and genetically determined (Lai, Lombardo, and Baron-Cohen 2014). It is diagnosed clinically based on quite generally and globally accepted criteria[5]: an assessment is made as to whether a child is impaired in her social relations and communication and displays repetitive behaviors and limited interests. Moreover, such behavior has to lead to significant challenges in the everyday functioning of the person involved in order to warrant a diagnosis (American Psychiatric Association 2013). ASD is diagnosed in the US in roughly 1 out of 59 children, and 4 times more frequently in boys than in girls (CDC, 2018).

[5] The most used criteria are enumerated in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of mental disorders (DSM) and the International Classification of Diseases (ICD), and both sets of criteria are similar.

We investigated the ways in which parents and physicians conceptualize and experience autism[6] by performing a literature review and an interview study (Jacobs et al. forthcoming). We found that a child's autism diagnosis strongly influences the parent-child relationship. In the following, we will show how neuro-parenting experts can also have a strong influence on parent-child relationships when the child is diagnosed with autism, and engender new levels of responsibilities. Then, we will demonstrate how an autism diagnosis as a neurological explanation of the child's difficult or different behavior may lift blame and responsibilities from both parents and child. This exculpation may be a valuable contribution to a good relationship between parents and child. Also, we discuss the fact that parents are considered to be responsible for knowing the neurological make-up of their child and for acting upon it. And finally, we will show how gender relates to autism and neuro-parenting.

Autism and the neuro-parenting experts

In the neuro-parenting discourse, raising children requires the input of experts. This requirement is specifically apparent when parenting becomes difficult, and parents search for additional help, specifically when they start the process of having their child assessed for autism. For example, Rossi describes how one becomes an 'autism parent' - the parent of a child who has been given an autism diagnosis by experts – not through instinct but through "education" by experts (Rossi 2012; Jacobs et al. under review). In this way, a parent is *taught* to become an 'autism parent'. However, an autism diagnosis can at the same time lessen parents' confidence in their expertise in relation to their child, as it suggests that their educational practices have been to some extent not well adapted to this child (Hodge 2006). Moreover, the influence of experts risks negatively shaping the relationship between parent and child. That is, an autism diagnosis - given by an expert - can be a "shaping lens" for parents towards their child, making the parent-child relationship "ambivalent" or "never the same again" (Hodge 2006; Lilley 2011; Avdi, Griffin, and Brough 2000). For example, Lilley quotes mothers who perceived having lost a normal mother-child relationship after their child was diagnosed with autism, and who interpreted their child's

[6] Like many other authors, we use autism as an abbreviation of ASD. Moreover, it is impossible to neatly distinguish ASD and an ASD diagnosis, since the influential DSM explicitly defines what is ASD by enumerating the criteria that have to be fulfilled in order for a person to merit an ASD diagnosis. Thus, the two concepts are inseparable.

special behaviors by wording the autism diagnostic criteria quite pejoratively (Lilley 2011). Moreover, an autism diagnosis has been described as robbing the interviewed parents of the joy and spontaneity of parenting: influenced by professional input, parenting styles can become more directive and intensive (Hodge 2006). Accordingly, some parents of children with an autism diagnosis have the feeling that they are teaching and curing all the time (Avdi 2000; Hodge 2006). Parents may feel they have to become experts themselves, by applying the professional expertise in their parenting practices themselves (Edwards et al. 2018). Hence, parental responsibilities are reconceptualized as also encompassing the duty to become an expert educator of the autistic child.

The exculpatory function of an autism diagnosis

A diagnosis of autism serves different purposes. It helps parents understand their child's behavior better and get access to services specifically designed to help autistic children. In our empirical research, we ascertained that understanding the child in neurological terms can have an important *exculpatory* function: the process of neurologization can actually contribute to a sound parent-child relationship after the diagnosis, as the diagnosis can help to safeguard the self-confidence of the parent in her love towards the child and to safeguard the love between parent and child. In the following, we present preliminary findings of two qualitative empirical studies that are currently ongoing. In these studies, we found that both parents and physicians believe that the de-blaming function is one of the most important effects of the ASD diagnosis: it leads to parents no longer being viewed as responsible for their child's problem. The physicians we interviewed find that parents in general (i.e. also beyond autism) are not to blame for their children's behavioral problems. But very often, parents tell physicians that they are being blamed by people for their child's behavior (autism-related or not). This is clear in the following quote by one of the interviewees, a child neurologist:

> *Parents very often say that people think they are to blame. Even teachers regularly say, 'But these parents really aren't directive enough'.*

Many of the physicians we interviewed see exculpation as of the utmost importance in the sense of removing blame from parents and the way they raise their child, but also in the sense of removing blame from the child. These physicians think it is extremely important to persuade consulting parents that their child is not 'bad' or behaving 'badly', and this is achieved by a

diagnosis that is conceived as firmly entrenched in neurology. They want to convey to parents that their child has no naughty intention in performing her unusual or challenging behavior but cannot help it: it is how her brain works. Another physician (a child psychiatrist) even considers this as the "essence" of her work:

> *The essence of my work is making parents understand: your child is willing to, but is not always able to, cannot always handle it.*

The physicians report that, in this respect, a diagnosis of ASD is useful, and even necessary, to effectively convey the exculpatory message about the child, and a diagnosis makes it possible for them to do their work with parents and schools. As this physician (a child psychiatrist) says:

> *The naughty child becomes the child with a problem who is not responsible for his behavior. And for a great lot of teachers that is a big difference, and so the interactions of the child are much more positive.*

Also, this mother explains:

> *People say: 'She cannot handle her child, she doesn't know how to raise her child, the child is being spoiled.' […] If you can tell people 'He has ASD', people will readily say 'Oh yes, he cannot help it', you know. Then maybe they will judge him less easily, and also us, you know.*

Thus, both the parents and the physicians we interviewed feel that, if a child has an autism diagnosis, parents are offered a way out of parental accountability and blame for their child's behavior. Indeed, the parents as well as the physicians have the experience that the general view on parental love carries a strong emphasis on parental accountability towards the behavior of a child. Moreover, the physicians believe that the exculpatory function of the ASD diagnosis is important not only to give parents psychological relief in that respect, that is, in order to remain self-confident in their relationship and love towards their child. But they also feel that this exculpatory function may enhance the loving relationship between the child and her parents. The parents we interviewed, despite the initial devastation when their child receives an ASD diagnosis, appreciate its usefulness mainly for two related reasons. First, parents (and also other adults around them) feel that the parents' attitude towards the child is not blameworthy anymore, since there is now a biological explanation for their child's problem. Biologizing the difficulties in a child's behavior may absolve parents from personal accountability, rendering them free of responsibility

and blame (Goffman 1990; Hacking 2006). Before the ASD diagnosis, parents were considered in some way not to have done their utmost, and hence to be lacking in parental investment. Second, the child herself is viewed by her parents (and also by other adults around them) as not responsible for her different or difficult behaviors, since these behaviors have a biological cause. So, not only the physicians but also the parents feel that a diagnosis can help to safeguard the self-confidence and love in their relationship to their child. At the same time, many parents are devastated when their child receives an ASD diagnosis, because they believe that it is a life-long handicap, and they fear the social reactions of stereotyping and stigmatizing the child.

In our general discussion of the neuro-parenting discourse, we have stated that through this discourse, a huge burden of individual responsibility is imposed on parents, and especially on mothers: their love is seen as responsible for the child's cognitive and socio-emotional development (Hens 2017). This is for example visible in the way that neuro-parenting is politically recuperated: moral and social problems are being biologized and thus individualized. In our discussion on autism, we have shown that the diagnosis of a biological problem can reduce the responsibility that parents feel in their interactions with the child: the behavior of the child is due to a neurological difference, not to a problem in her education. Moreover, such a biological diagnosis can convince parents that their child is not responsible for her different or difficult behavior. Thus, both parents and child may experience an exculpatory effect thanks to an autism diagnosis. Against the background of the general neuro-parenting discourse, the diagnosis of a biological problem in the child contributes to the preservation (or development) of a sound parent-child relationship. Hence, the example of autism demonstrates that the relationship between neurological discourse, blame and responsibility is complex and multifaceted.

Autism: a duty to know in order to act upon it neurologically

Autism experts used to say that it was important to *diagnose* autism (in order to adapt the environment to the affected person); today, they advocate diagnosing autism as *early* as possible. An early diagnosis can lead to early therapy. The conviction is that an autism brain is malleable when it is behaviorally tackled very early on for at least two reasons: autism is generally viewed

as a purely biological condition requiring behavioral therapy[7]; and the infant's brain is biologically understood as being extremely plastic in the first three years of life (Bruer 1999). As a matter of fact, Bruer argues forcefully that this early "critical period" or "window of opportunity" is only very modestly evidence-based, leading to his provocative statement of "the myth of the first three years" (Bruer 1999). Still, influenced by the current discourse on early diagnosis and therapy, parents say they feel strongly encouraged to get both a diagnosis and therapy as early as possible. They may feel pressure to "get as much therapy as they can" for their child (Rossi 2012). According to this mother of an almost 2-year-old child:

> *They [the professionals] told me that it is better to do the testing early, especially since he is not yet attending school, that we would be able to prevent a lot of problems.*

She continues, however, by saying that lay people very often tell her:

> *Well, you only have to get this [the ASD diagnostic assessment] done when he is 5 or 6 years.*

The father of the child adds:

> *Yes, I first thought so too ... not too quickly because maybe they would not be able to see things accurately enough, because he cannot say a lot himself etcetera, but yes, apparently it is possible nevertheless.*

So, experts tell people it is important to start testing and therapy early, while both parents and other lay people may initially have doubts and need to be persuaded by the experts. In this respect, Nikolas Rose says about the current neurological understanding of the human being: "This is not a biology of fate or destiny, but a biology that is open for intervention and improvement, malleable and plastic, and for which we have responsibility to nurture and optimize." There is an *obligation to take care* of our brain. He links this emphasis on plastic, flexible brains, to socio-political demands for individual flexibility across the life span and for a constant effort of self-improvement by citizens (Rose and Abi-Rached 2013). In this respect, it has already been shown that parents may experience a sense of responsibility towards their child's development (Singh 2016). It is

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[7] In the current brain-based understanding of human beings, the enhancement of the brain is preferably biological, genetic and neurological - for example, with drugs or genetic manipulation. Behavioral modification is considered a second best, since studies consistently suggest that behavioral change is linked to changes in the brain (Kobayashi et al. 2005; Straube et al. 2006).

interesting that both in the neuro-parenting discourse and in the discourse on autism, this plasticity is conceived as only occurring in the first few years of development. Accordingly, it has been found that parents' sense of responsibility can be paired with a frightening "sense of urgency" (Hodge 2006). Hence, although we have argued that the diagnosis of autism, through its biological interpretation of the child's behavior, helps to exculpate parents and children by suggesting that they cannot help it, it is "in the child's brain", such a diagnosis also engenders a duty to act upon this knowledge, by acknowledging the diagnosis as early as possible, in order to intervene while it is still possible.

Autism and gender

Neuro-parenting discourse forces us to assess the attributions of responsibilities on different levels. We have shown that *mothers* are predominantly targeted in parenting discourses in general. Also with respect to the research on autism, the experiences of mothers caring for a child with an autism diagnosis have been investigated much more than those of fathers (DePape and Lindsay 2015). Researchers have rarely empirically investigated the experiences of *fathers* (Timimi, Gardner, and McCabe 2011) with regard to caring for a child with an autism diagnosis, or fathers' views on autism and an autism diagnosis (Jacobs et al. under review). Such studies are necessary for at least two reasons (in addition to the obvious reason that fathers are children's parents too). The first reason is that ASD is diagnosed four times more often in boys than in girls (CDC 2018). So men may feel more implicated whenever it concerns autism. The second reason for investigating fathers' experiences is that, according to one well-known theory, the "extreme male brain theory" (Baron-Cohen 2002), autism is considered an extreme of the normal male profile[8]. Thus, it is useful to get a grasp of what it means to be the father of a child with an autism diagnosis when autism is not only linked to your particular sex but also to a rather deterministic view on your sex's brain. In particular, research is also needed to establish how the duty to know a child's neurological status might influence fathers. Indeed, hearing the current findings on the relationship between autism and a person's sex, fathers might in some way feel more personally involved than their child's mother when it comes to the child's neurological make-up. Hence, research on the

[8] The proponents of this theory claim that a male brain is significantly better in systemising than empathising. At the same time, they define the female brain as showing the opposite cognitive profile.

implication of concepts of (gendered) neurology on paternal love and responsibility is urgently needed.

With respect to the exculpatory function of an autism diagnosis, the focus on mothers is twofold. Previously, mothers have been found on the one hand to be *targeted* more often in the comments of people in their environment – i.e. enacted stigma – and on the other hand, to *feel affected* more often by what other people might think of them – i.e. felt stigma (Gray 2002), in this case comments (spoken out loud or suspected by mothers) on their responsibility and their child-rearing methods. For example, in our interview study with parents of recently diagnosed children, this mother of a 1-year-old child states that:

I get a lot of contradictory messages from the people around me, these messages touch me more than they affect him [points to the father].

According to the mother of a 4-year-old child:

It is often in the street like that, if a child starts screaming or is lying on the ground… I have children, I know how this goes, I am not going to judge that mother, and also other mothers they understand this. But yes, people sometimes really give such a particular glance or remark, yes.

Moreover, a biological explanation of a child's autism seems to be especially relevant for mothers. Indeed, the relationship between a mother's parenting behavior and a child's autistic behavior has a long and problematic history. Some decades ago, the prevailing theory on autism attributed it to the detached and cold parenting by so-called "refrigerator mothers" (Verhoeff 2013). The search for genes and biological causes of autism can partly be explained by the need to remove the blame from mothers (Hens and Van Goidsenhoven 2017; Nadesan 2005). As is apparent from qualitative research, these mechanisms are still at work on a micro level (Avdi, Griffin, and Brough 2000; Jacobs et al. 2018). Also, when it comes to the discourses both on the need to involve experts and on the duty to know your child's neurological status and to act upon it accordingly, we can expect that mothers are more receptive. Indeed, we have shown that parenting discourses are predominantly directed at mothers, and mothers have been found to be more affected by what other people might think of them. If a neurological problem is suspected, the mothers may be the first ones to be held responsible to act on this information.

The complex relationship between neurology and responsibility

In this paper, we have sketched some of the implications that findings from neuroscience can have for responsibility. Although we acknowledge the importance of acquiring biological knowledge on issues related to parental love and the parent-child relationship, we have pointed out that neurologizing parenthood is not without its challenges. Moreover, we have shown that a neurological explanation of behavioral challenges can exculpate parents ("refrigerator mothers") and children and thus ameliorate familial relationships. Nevertheless, we raise some concerns regarding the neurologization of parental love, and we call for a more nuanced way of thinking about parental responsibility, based on the work of Joan Tronto.

We have argued that in the current dominant Western discourse on parenting in general and in the understanding of a child's ASD diagnosis in particular, biologization and neurologization are prominent. We have demonstrated that biologizing parental love, with its emphasis on motherly duties, risks biologizing and 'naturalizing' the still prevalent gendered positions in parental love. Both fathers and mothers can feel pressed to adhere to fixed parental roles that are - once again - being attributed to them, this time with the (neuro)scientifically sustained argument of being 'natural'.

Also, such biologization often seems to be closely linked to medicalization and the location of challenges solely in an individual's neurological (or genetic) makeup, as distinct from the psychosocial context. Related to disabilities such as autism, this is often described as the *medical model of disability*: a person's disability is exclusively attributed to her impaired body or mind. Alternatives are possible: in the socia*l model of disability*, the environment is viewed as responsible for disabling or enabling the individual (Kafer 2013). But one need not give up biological interpretations of challenges in favor of psychological interpretations. In fact, the challenges we have described above seem to be linked to a deterministic and atomistic interpretation of brains and biology. Both in the neuro-parenting discourse on attachment and early development of the brain as well as in the call for early detection of autism, the possibility is sketched that brains are flexible and can be improved. However, this discourse reflects a very limited view on plasticity. The brain is only plastic for a limited period in a person's life (in utero, and in the first 3 years). But recent theories, such as epigenetics and enactivism, suggest a more dynamic view on genes and brains respectively: both genes and brains are strongly influenced in

their activity by the *environment*, and these influences extend over a lifetime (Dupras, Ravitsky, and Williams-Jones 2014; Fuchs and Jaegher 2009; Hens and Van Goidsenhoven 2017). Hence, the continuous interaction of biology (epigenetics) and brain (enactivism) with the environment challenges a simplistic, individualized view on biology. So even in a biologized understanding of parental love and of behavioral difficulties, a purely biological discourse does not justify individualizing these difficulties. Indeed, viewing both the love for a child and the child's difficulties mostly or only as the circumscribed responsibility of parents is not supported by recent scientific research - since this research points to the importance of more dynamic views on biology. Not only are many of the interpretations of the implications of neuroscience for parenting unscientific, they also have problematic ethical implications. For example, the stress on individual and parental responsibility also paints a dire picture of what happens if a parent is not able to fulfil the individual duty to care for her child during the presumed "window of opportunity". Imagine a mother suffering from postnatal depression who is too tired to provide the prescribed stimulating environment. Surely we can do better than attribute the responsibility solely to her.

In her work on care ethics Joan Tronto reports that the societal view on *caring in general* is both deeply gendered and individualized. She shows how in a neoliberal society the "work ethic" model suggests that "what people deserve is what they have worked to obtain". She argues that this model is widely endorsed and taken for granted (Tronto 2013). We contend that the Western dominant discourse on parenting is in line with Tronto's "work ethic" model. In this discourse, the child-rearing efforts made by the individual parent (especially the mother) are viewed as responsible for the (brain) development of the child. Tronto instead argues that care in a "caring democracy" should be a collectively shared responsibility and the highest value that shapes the economy, politics and institutions such as schools and families (Tronto 2013).

In this paper, we have only sketched the ramifications of simplistic interpretations of neuro-discourse for how parental responsibility is perceived. We have shown that these ramifications are both complex, because they can take away old and impose new responsibilities, and too simplistic, as they situate responsibility on a gendered and individual level. We suggest that, taking all the promises and challenges of neuro-discourse into account, more work is needed on how as a society we can non-judgmentally help parents, both mothers and fathers, to lovingly bring up their children.

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The Freedom to Love: On the Unclaimability of (Maternal) Love

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Keywords: Maternal love, feminism, rights, freedom, subjectivity.

Introduction

Parental love is foundational for countless other relationships in a person's life. The indispensability of parental love to human flourishing has led some philosophers, such as S. Matthew Liao, to argue that children have a right to be loved by their parents—in other words, it is a duty for parents to love their children and children can make a claim on them for this love.[1] Liao's argument focuses on what children can claim from their parents without making gender distinctions, yet disparate cultural expectations placed on mothers and fathers call for special consideration of whether maternal love ought to be conceived of as a right. That Western thought demarcates paternal love from maternal love in terms of freedom is summed up in Jean-Luc Marion's depiction of a father's relationship to his child. He writes:

> *Every child is born naturally from its mother, but strictly speaking, it always remains of unknown father; there is no child who is not a foundling—that is to say, received. As a result, it has been admitted since time immemorial that the sole proof of paternity resides in the juridical recognition of the child by the father; paternity is accomplished symbolically, not first of all or always biologically. The father becomes one, in all cases and not only in adoption, only by his decision to recognize, ask for, and claim as his own the foundling and natural child.*[2]

Whereas men's freedom is emphasized in choosing to become a father after a child's birth, it is taken for granted that women automatically will accept and love their children. This expectation emphasizes male freedom and undermines the freedom of women in relation to their children. More so than paternal love, maternal love is conceived, even if tacitly so, to be claimable

[1] S. Matthew Liao, *The Right to be Loved* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
[2] Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness,* trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 300.

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by children, inordinately compromising women's freedom to love. Expectations placed upon maternal love exceed those placed upon paternal love; this inequality emerges from a variety of sources, including cultural, social, and scientific perspectives. In almost all countries within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, women spend at least twice as much time on caring as do men.[3] In one study assessing the division of time in heterosexual households, researchers found that mothers perform significantly more childcare and housework than fathers, whilst fathers spent more time than mothers engaging in leisurely activities.[4] This discrepancy evinces cultural attitudes that childcare is obligatory for women in a way that it is not for men. Given the pervasive view that maternal love is innate and effortless,[5] rather than a matter of choice, it seems that women's freedom to love their children is constricted doubly by characterizing maternal love as innate and so not a matter of choice and placing an inordinate obligation upon mothers to care for their children thereby unduly circumscribing their choices.

My worry is that these traditional gendered attitudes originate in expectations about female sacrifice and male magnanimity—women owe their children love, and are expected to demonstrate it as a matter of course, while both feeling and demonstrating love for their children remains a matter of choice for men, who may offer it as a gift. For this reason, in this article I focus particularly on maternal love rather than more generally discussing parental love. In this article, I will not engage directly with the literature framing parent-child love in terms of rights and duties. Instead, my aim is to show that maternal love is best conceptualized using the framework of the *gift*.

Making maternal love a duty presents particular problems from a feminist perspective to the degree that it unduly limits women's freedom and reinforces a common failure to address the problematic implications of doing so. As one feminist scholar writes, the "idealized, *a priori* nature of maternal love promulgated by traditional discourses on motherhood is still widely assumed to be inherent and natural so that scholars rarely question its structure."[6] Excessively permeable or

[3] "Gender Brief," OECD Social Policy Division, published March 2010.
[4] Claire M. Kamp Dush, Jill E. Yavorsky, and Sarah J. Schoppe-Sullivan, "What Are Men Doing While Women Perform Extra Unpaid Labor?" *Sex Roles* 78, no.11-12 (2018): 715).
[5] See, for example, Robin Veder, "Mother-love for Plant-Children: Sentimental Pastoralism and Nineteenth-Century Parlour Gardening," *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 26, no. 2 (2007): 25-26.
[6] Tatjana Takseva, "Mother Love, Maternal Ambivalence, and the Possibility of Empowered Mothering," *Hypatia* 32, no. 1 (2017): 152.

even undefined boundaries between self and other create further problems for a feminist love. In this article, I examine the metaphysics of maternal love as a propaedeutic exercise in determining what kind of claims can be made upon it and what possibilities and demands remain when that love is lacking. I consider women's oppression and its implications for maternal love by analyzing authentic love, maternal ambivalence, vulnerability and openness, freedom, and the indeterminacy of the source of love. I conclude that love is a third thing that transcends self and other.[7] Due to the undefinability of who possesses the love, it cannot be claimed; correlatively, because the realization of love ultimately lies outside one's control, it cannot be considered a duty. Moreover, to make maternal love a matter of moral obligation unduly compromises women's agency. The threat of compromising agency makes crucial the understanding that love is a gift, rather than a right that can be claimed. To conceive of maternal love as both gift and task ultimately protects the freedom of both mother and child.

Authentic Love and Freedom

The work of Simone de Beauvoir suggests at least one reason maternal love cannot be considered as something that can be claimed. For Beauvoir, love is only possible when women are free rather than oppressed. The love, in order to be authentic, must be the fruit of an elective choice rather than of a societal demand that a woman live solely for others. This becomes clear in her description of authentic love between romantic lovers:

> Authentic love must be founded on reciprocal recognition of two freedoms; each lover would then experience himself as himself and as the other; neither would abdicate his transcendence, they would not mutilate themselves; together they would both reveal values and ends in the world. For each of them, love would be the revelation of self through the gift of self and the enrichment of the universe.[8]

[7] I further hold that love is a third thing transcending action and emotion insofar as it is not reducible to either emotion, action, or a combination of the two, but for the purposes of this argument, I will focus on its distinctness from self and other.
[8] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (London: Vintage Books, 2011), 723.

In these considerations, Beauvoir has in mind reciprocal, heterosexual love and yet her insights prove relevant for thinking through maternal love. Although the mother-child relationship is distinct from romantic love given that there are unilateral responsibilities with regard to care, I believe her vision can extend to the mother-child relationship as well as other loving relationships in which loving emotions can be shared, and in which the freedom of both parties is valued. By making love a right that children can claim from their mothers and therefore making maternal love a duty, we unnecessarily render that love unfree and by so doing preclude the very possibility of its authenticity. In order to preserve the freedom necessary for love to be authentic, it is critical to understand maternal love as something that cannot be claimed by others as a right.

Vulnerability

Love has its limits or, at least, lovers have a duty to themselves and one another to enact limits, including in circumstances when "one's capacity to love is harmed or destroyed by the loved one."[9] Yet at the same time, love requires vulnerability. Diane Enns writes that what annihilates the conditions for love is *in*vulnerability.[10] In terms of maternal love, this may be one thing that can be deemed a duty: to become and perpetually remain vulnerable to one's own child. This way of relating lies within a mother's control—she can choose to be open and receptive to the child, to choose to allow herself to be moved by and deeply affected by her child, and to ensure that this vulnerability is ongoing in the relationship. It further allows for mutual vulnerability between parent and child, allowing for some degree of reciprocity in their relationship.

Such reciprocity is explicitly valued in some cultures. One scholar claims that indigenous ideologies of motherhood are "distinct from patriarchal western models of motherhood"[11] and the culturally-specific strategy for empowered mothering she describes involves conceiving of the mother-child relationship as reciprocal. From such a perspective, children are not seen as "helpless babies who need to be controlled" but rather as "independent spiritual beings, who have many

[9] Diane Enns, "Love's Limit" in *Thinking About Love: Essays in Contemporary Continental Philosophy,* eds. Diane Enns and Antonio Calcagno (University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), 43.
[10] Enns, "Love's Limit," 44.
[11] Kim Anderson, "Giving Life to the People: An Indigenous Ideology of Motherhood" in *Maternal Theory: Essential Readings,* ed. Andrea O'Reilly (Toronto: Demeter Press, 2007), 775; cited in Takseva, "Mother Love, Maternal Ambivalence, and the Possibility of Empowered Mothering," 158.

things to teach their parents."[12] Along these same lines, Amy Mullin claims that "many of the skills and virtues involved in caring well for a child require a caregiver to acknowledge the point of view of the child in his or her care, and to appreciate the child's efforts at self-direction as well as the child's contributions to the relationship with the caregiver."[13] Even within western cultures, then, respecting children's contributions to their relationship to their parents can be conceptualized in ways that enhance freedom for both mother and child.

These perspectives open up the possibility of a love that is conducive to mutual freedom and reciprocal influence in mother-child relationships that points away from making maternal love something that can be claimed as a right. At the same time, insofar as viewing the child as independent and able to reciprocate love is conducive to a mother's own sense of independence and freedom, it may also prove to be more productive of love than a relationship conceived in more unilateral and self-sacrificial ways. Such a conception of maternal love requires a certain type of trust in the child as a being who can act morally and as one who loves—this conception lends itself to maternal vulnerability that fosters an expansion of a third thing, namely love, that ultimately transcends both mother and child.

Tying trust as vulnerability to the development of subjectivity, Anthony Steinbock writes that trusting is "most deeply an openness to the person as loving—that which reveals 'person' as such."[14] Love, then, is crucial to the subject insofar as love is to be understood as "intertwined with or structured by trust."[15] Paradoxically, the loving trust that cultivates subjectivity requires a letting go of the self. Elaborating that it is impossible to love without becoming vulnerable to another and without being open to being hurt by them, Enns writes: "Without this opening to the other—an abandoning of the self in the surge of love—we are unable to see ourselves through another's eyes." This inability results in a state of being invisible to ourselves that amounts to a sort of blindness. She warns that if we "remain blind in such a way, we can neither give nor receive

[12] Leanne Simpson, "Birthing an Indigenous Resurgence: Decolonizing our Pregnancy and Birthing Ceremonies" in *"Until our Hearts are on the Ground": Aboriginal Mothering, Oppression, Resistance and Rebirth,* ed. D. Memee Lavell-Harvard and Jeannette Corbiere Lavell (Toronto: Demeter Press, 2006), 26; Takseva, "Mother Love, Maternal Ambivalence, and the Possibility of Empowered Mothering," 158.
[13] Amy Mullin, "Filial Responsibilities of Dependent Children," *Hypatia* 25, no. 1 (2010): 161.
[14] Anthony J. Steinbock, "Temporality, Transcendence, and Being Bound to Others in Trust" in *Trust, Sociality, Selfhood,* ed. Arne Grøn and Claudia Welz (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 93; cited in Fiona Utley, "Trust and the Experience of Love" in *Thinking About Love: Essays in Contemporary Continental Philosophy,* eds. Diane Enns and Antonio Calcagno (University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), 176.
[15] Utley, "Trust and the Experience of Love," 174.

love; we remain sovereigns perpetually on guard, deflecting threats, to be sure, but gestures of love and generosity as well."[16] Love is impossible without vulnerability, I suggest, largely because respect for another's freedom entails vulnerability to her.

For Enns, the definitive aspect of love is a reciprocal letting be of one another.[17] The moments of self-negation that allow both the other to be and the self to become vulnerable foster a mutual becoming of the selves. The fact that delineation between the self and other remains nebulous and elusive in love seems to contribute to the vulnerability that renders this possible. At the same time, the indefiniteness and ambiguity between self and other lends itself to an argument that love cannot therefore be claimed. Before I develop that argument, I want to look more closely at the value of the ambiguity of the relationship between a mother and her child, from a feminist perspective.

Maternal Love as the Only Authentic Love

Catrin Gibson argues that the indeterminate and therefore ambiguous union of mother and child—by which she means that boundaries between self and other are not clearly distinguished as in other relationships between human beings—makes possible the existence of authentic love. She relies on Jean-Paul Sartre's account of authentic love, which Sartre himself takes to be (for the most part) impossible. Gibson then uses maternal love, which Sartre does not consider when offering his analysis, to exemplify love in its authentic form. On Sartre's definition, authentic love is a mutual comprehension of freedom coupled with the generous acceptance of one's own and the other's facticity.[18] Whereas Sartre understands all human relationships to be grounded in conflict,[19] Gibson contends that the mother-child relationship is grounded in love.[20] As she understands the relationship, both child and mother regard one another as independent, especially as the child learns self-other boundaries from the mother.[21] The child's actuation of separation from his mother

[16] Enns, "Love's Limit," 44.
[17] Enns, "Love's Limit," 32.
[18] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 510; cited in Catrin Gibson, "Authentic Love and the Mother-Child Relationship," *Sartre Studies International* 23, no.1 (2017): 60.
[19] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1943, 1984), 555.
[20] Gibson, "Authentic Love and the Mother-Child Relationship," 76.
[21] Gibson, "Authentic Love and the Mother-Child Relationship," 68.

facilitates their relationship.[22] This points to an empowered and autonomous form of love on the part of the mother.

According to Gibson, mother and child relationships prove themselves to be forms of authentic love because they are not characterized by a Sartrean desire to be God to the other; these relationships are authentic insofar as there is a mutual comprehension of the other's freedom. Freedom is maintained in the relationship because, although one cannot say so without qualification, "giving birth is ultimately a matter of choice."[23] Further, the relation exemplifies authentic love because mother and child are generous to each other.[24] Instead of seeking to become God in relation to the other, the mother reaches out to the child, making her an absolute end.[25]

Gibson argues that one way in which this is instantiated is through the mother's generosity to the fetus from the time of conception, by overriding her immune system to support the embryo and later fetus's life.[26] This generosity results from the ambiguous relation arising from the blurred lines between self and other in the mother-child relationship; this generosity is further reciprocal since throughout pregnancy, labor, and childcare, the mother and her child "come into intimate contact with each other's facticity and accept each other in generosity."[27] Furthermore, in the authentic love of the maternal relationship, mother and child see each other as subjects—this is evinced by such typical behaviors as giving each other time to respond to each other even when the baby is preverbal.[28] Moreover, on Gibson's view, there is no shame or displacement due to the fact that the relationship is both permanent and irreplaceable.[29]

In privileging mother-child relationships as exemplary of authentic love, Gibson hopes to show that the realization of authentic love is precluded in romantic love not due to the nature of human beings, but as a result of the patriarchal situation in which they live. This patriarchal context oppresses women largely by undermining their subjectivity and freedom.[30] I suggest that to conceive of love as a right of children is to stake a claim on mother's emotional responses to their

[22] Gibson, "Authentic Love and the Mother-Child Relationship," 69.
[23] Gibson, "Authentic Love and the Mother-Child Relationship," 73.
[24] Gibson, "Authentic Love and the Mother-Child Relationship," 69.
[25] Gibson, "Authentic Love and the Mother-Child Relationship," 70.
[26] Gibson, "Authentic Love and the Mother-Child Relationship," 72.
[27] Gibson, "Authentic Love and the Mother-Child Relationship," 73.
[28] Gibson, "Authentic Love and the Mother-Child Relationship," 72.
[29] Gibson, "Authentic Love and the Mother-Child Relationship," 73.
[30] Gibson, "Authentic Love and the Mother-Child Relationship," 61, 76.

children, rather than solely on their actions towards them.[31] To do so may demand something that is both impossible and unnecessary to make obligatory, which may further result in undermining women's subjectivity and freedom. At the same time, conceptualizing maternal love in terms of rights may risk the loss of love's authenticity in a way that also undermines the development of a child's subjectivity and freedom.

Maternal Ambivalence

Beyond the issue of ambiguity in the relationship between a mother and her child, the issue of ambivalence proves helpful in facilitating authenticity, subjectivity, and freedom in love. Beauvoir offers an example of maternal ambivalence in *The Second Sex,* when she describes a woman who was unsure whether her child was the offspring of her husband or of her lover; it was not until she made the choice to consider her husband to be the father that she took positive emotional interest in the child.[32] Arguing in support of the importance of maternal ambivalence, Tatjana Takseva posits it as an important component of maternal love that offers an empowering space to mothers. This ambivalence includes "loving and hating the same child" and can provoke conflict in a mother to the degree that these mixed feelings clash with the dominant discourse about maternal love.[33] Yet if women can overcome the guilt and anxiety over countering cultural norms and can "accept ambivalence as a creative rather than a threatening force in their love toward their children," they turn out to be happier mothers.[34] Whereas obligatory maternal love limits a woman's freedom, a constructive and productive use of ambivalence enhances it in ways that further support her well-being.

The issue of maternal ambivalence points to the fact that on some level, women's feelings toward their children prove to be mercurial, which poses a significant challenge in regarding maternal love as a duty. If maternal love is binding as such, then it is clearly more than emotion and more than action insofar as emotional states vary and imperfect actions do not entail that one

[31] Mhairi Cowden, *Children's Rights: From Philosophy to Public Policy* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 151-152.
[32] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* 550.
[33] Takseva, "Mother Love, Maternal Ambivalence, and the Possibility of Empowered Mothering," 158; Takseva also relies on Parker to make this point, see Rozsika Parker, *Torn in Two: The Experience of Maternal Ambivalence* (London: Virago Press, 1995), 4.
[34] Takseva, "Mother Love, Maternal Ambivalence, and the Possibility of Empowered Mothering," 158.

does not love. Adrienne Rich, in her extended philosophical analysis of maternal love, admits that she always believed that it is or at least should be "quite literally selfless,"[35] which for her meant that it could be sustained at every moment. Yet, she shares in her book a letter sent by her adult son: "You seemed to feel you ought to love us all the time. But there *is* no human relationship where you love the other person at every moment."[36] Takseva insists that women's belief that they must love in this impossible way is the fruit of patriarchal ideologies of motherhood that have defined the terms of maternal love such that "a good mother always and in every second of her existence feels nothing but pure love and unadulterated joy for her children."[37] In contrast to this engendered, internalized cultural belief, many women respond ambivalently to their children; these responses can be constructive for both mother and child. Moreover, this ambivalence resists the circumscription of love imposed by patriarchal standards.

In order to discuss ambivalence within the dynamics of mother-child love, Takseva focuses on women who were raped during the Bosnian genocide and became mothers as a result. Like Beauvoir's example above, these women's narratives illuminate that love is not always innate, but instead comes about, at least in part, as a result of a choice and personal discipline. One woman declares, "I had to work very hard to love my child."[38] From this and other examples, Takseva concludes that love is not a matter of nature, but of commitment and practice. In fact, she definitively states that "maternal love is not something that 'naturally' springs into being with the act of giving birth … it too, like love in any other close relationship, requires conscious and ongoing renewal of commitment."[39] This implies that love may also be a matter of creativity. Takseva concludes from her observations that maternal love ought to belong to the same category as other loves, rather than standing apart as a disparate thing. According to her, women who can see their children as separate individuals whose mental states change benefit by gaining an interactive awareness, greater self-understanding, and therefore a more empowered mothering practice.

Because it can serve as a site for freedom, maternal ambivalence can become a tool of maternal empowerment that provides mothers with "a counter-narrative to dominant patriarchal

[35] Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: Norton, 1976), 3.
[36] Rich, *Of Woman Born,* 3.
[37] Takseva, "Mother Love, Maternal Ambivalence, and the Possibility of Empowered Mothering," 159.
[38] Takseva, "Mother Love, Maternal Ambivalence, and the Possibility of Empowered Mothering," 161.
[39] Takseva, "Mother Love, Maternal Ambivalence, and the Possibility of Empowered Mothering," 161.

discourses of ideal motherhood" when consciously recognized and utilized by the mothers themselves. This constructive use of their own ambivalence toward their children enables women to employ autonomy in "authoring their own maternal experience."[40] This is crucial given the belief that in order to empower their children, women must first be empowered themselves.[41] When mothers can view and accept themselves without idealization, they gain in both emotional and ethical forms of maturity which manifests itself positively in the lives of their children in terms of empowerment. When they disburden themselves of anxiety and guilt, they can find and create "more constructive behavioral frameworks of mutuality and reciprocity in their care for their children."[42] Opening a space for maternal ambivalence as constitutive of maternal love redefines it in ways that expand the capacities of both a mother and her child. It further allows for more empowered relationships between children and other caregivers and frees women from the patriarchal discourses on motherhood that are damaging to them. I emphasize here that engaging in this ambivalence allows a woman and her child to recognize themselves as co-creators in the relationship of love between them rather than as mere passive inheritors of it.

Freedom and Openness

Shelley Park likewise takes up the issue of freedom in maternal love. She claims that technologies of co-presence—such as baby monitors or cell phones—allow women to be creative and make more conscientious choices about love that facilitate their independence and cultivate their relationships. She writes that the "cyborg mother does not just instinctively respond to her child's cry." Instead, this mother decides conscientiously to turn communication devices on or off. Whenever a device seeks her attention, she exercises intention and choice regarding if and how she will respond. Park concludes from this that cyborg love is more likely than other forms of maternal love to be "experienced as the practice of freedom."[43] Distance and innovation allow a

[40] Takseva, "Mother Love, Maternal Ambivalence, and the Possibility of Empowered Mothering," 164.
[41] Andrea O'Reilly, "Introduction" in *Mother Outlaws: Theories and Practices of Empowered Mothering,* ed. Andrea O'Reilly (Toronto: Women's Press, 2004), 12-13; cited in Takseva, "Mother Love, Maternal Ambivalence, and the Possibility of Empowered Mothering," 165.
[42] Takseva, "Mother Love, Maternal Ambivalence, and the Possibility of Empowered Mothering," 165.
[43] Shelley Park, "Cyborg Mothering" in *Mothers Who Deliver: Feminist Interventions in Interpersonal and Public Discourse,* eds. Jocelyn Fenton Stitt and Pegeen Reichert Powell (New York: SUNY Press, 2010), 72. Park clarifies that a cyborg mother uses her agency when she carefully chooses her tone and words to reprimand a child over

woman space to determine her own conscientious, individual, and authentic responses to her child. While Park does not do so, I wish to add that the very practices that she prescribes as freeing for women can, when implemented in ways appropriate to the context as well as the age and needs of the child, also foster independence in the child by presenting her with occasions to learn to soothe herself and practice independent problem solving in the absence of her mother.

Park ties her discussion of freedom and maternal love back to the issue of openness. She relies on Kelly Oliver who writes that it is "only through vigilant reinterpretation and elaboration of our own performance" of opening ourselves up in relation to others that we can maintain a loving attitude.[44] In this construction of love, Oliver is influenced by Julia Kristeva, who defines love as "openness to the other."[45] Oliver observes that "love is not something we choose once and for all. Rather, it is a decision that must be constantly reaffirmed through the vigilance of self-reflection."[46] Although I would not reduce love to openness, I maintain that remaining open to the other constitutes a critical component of loving relationships and that it can more clearly be seen as something that results from choice than can the feeling of love. For this reason, remaining open can be considered part of the task of love that sits within the control of a mother. Because it is conducive to bringing about the feeling of love, it may contribute to the experience of love as a further possibility.

Rather than being compulsory, "loving from afar" proves to be "liberating."[47] Space between child and mother creates new possibilities for relationships: technologies of co-presence "make possible extensions and transformations of ourselves that engage in the critical self-reflection necessary to loving one another consciously and intentionally across emotional and cognitive, as well as geographical and temporal, boundaries."[48] The expansiveness of love's possible conformations highlights the freedom of expression of those who love. When combined

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electronic communication so that her loving concern is better reflected than might occur in the "exasperation of the in-person moment" (Park, "Cyborg Mothering, 73).

[44] Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 220-21; quoted in Park, "Cyborg Mothering," 73. On this point, Oliver is influenced by bell hooks.

[45] Julia Kristeva, "Interview with Elaine Hoffman Baruch on Feminism in the United States and France," in *The Portable Kristeva*, ed. Kelly Oliver, updated ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 381.

[46] Oliver, *Witnessing,* 220-21; quoted in Park, "Cyborg Mothering," 73.

[47] Park, "Cyborg Mothering," 73.

[48] Park, "Cyborg Mothering," 73.

with the attendant indefiniteness of love, this supports the notion that conceptualizing love as a right, duty, or obligation unnecessarily constrains and diminishes it.

Ultimately, Park suggests that familial intimacy in general and maternal love in particular can be transformed by technologies of co-presence.[49] The potential of love, including familial love, to be transformed through agentic choices about how to traverse the chasms between individuals speaks to the metaphysics of maternal love insofar as it suggests a possibly profound malleability, not to mention multiformity, of the mother-child relationship. Technologies are liberating in that women are not forced to respond unthinkingly to every demand on their time and attention; rather, technologies "enable the critical distance necessary for love that is reflective and transformative."[50] Focusing so much on the autonomous choices of mothers in creating patterns of loving relationship may seem to shortchange children in terms of an ability to claim a right to be loved. Yet if love by its very nature requires the sort of freedom described by the feminist scholars discussed in this article, then love can only exist in a way that eludes the making of claims upon it.

Love as a Third Thing

Phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty speaks to the fact that love creates a new relationship that can make ambiguous the boundaries between self and other. He writes:

> *To love is inevitably to enter into an undivided situation with another …. One is not what he would be without that love; the perspectives remain separate—and yet they overlap …. To the very extent that it is convincing and genuine, the experience of the other is necessarily an alienating one, in the sense that it tears me away from my lone self and creates instead a mixture of myself and the other.*[51]

The elision of boundaries that Merleau-Ponty describes points to the creation of a third thing that is amorphous, making duties and claims difficult to locate. This proves to be true even

[49] Park, "Cyborg Mothering," 71.
[50] Park, "Cyborg Mothering," 71.
[51] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," in *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, eds. Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 183; quoted in Utley, "Trust and the Experience of Love," 172.

more so when one considers each relationship of love to be an entirely new creation, as F.O. Matthiessen suggests in describing a love relationship that does not conform to patriarchal stereotypes: we "must create everything for ourselves."[52] The co-creation of a shared world is both an act of love and an act of trust.[53] The love that exists between two is more than the love of each combined—this makes the boundaries between self and other less definite and even more so makes indefinite what can be claimed as one's own from this conglomerate entity.

In a similar vein, Enns observes that as with other emotions, "love may take on a life of its own that becomes bigger than the one who feels it."[54] Moreover, the emergence of love is not completely traceable. Enns writes that love is "born in a moment of *unnamable* affinity."[55] Speaking to the issue of union that borders on amalgamation while distinguishing the love she describes from a Christian notion of transcendent love, she elucidates that such "love rises from one body to enfold another."[56] Although she does not intend to, such language encapsulates an experience of pregnancy. In depicting the love she experiences for a partner, Enns gives an apt description of maternal love: *"I swell with love for you. I surge toward you and experience the overwhelming pleasure of the flow of passionate feeling, desire, and care. My life becomes meaningful in a way it was not before, urgent, in the awareness of the fragility of your life. I love you because I can. Because you are there naked before me, suffering, surviving, loving me with all your singularity, in ambivalence and failure. I love you for the vulnerable self that you laid at my feet and out of the stubborn belief that my love is omnipotent."*[57] Love involves an essential freedom and yet concretizes in a way that surpasses what freedom is able to effect. Acknowledging love as a matter of freedom without overstating the case by making it solely contingent upon agency preserves women's freedom doubly by both acknowledging their creative contributions to love and not making it a matter of obligation.

Luce Irigaray relies on a notion of love as a third thing precisely because she is concerned with the cultivation and protection of dual subjectivities. Naming the problem that for woman, "nothing is ever finite," Irigaray is acutely aware of the ambiguous boundaries between self and

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52 Uncited source quoted in Enns, "Love's Limit," 41.
53 Utley, "Trust and the Experience of Love," 182.
54 Enns, "Love's Limit," 39.
55 Enns, "Love's Limit," 39, emphasis mine.
56 Enns, "Love's Limit," 39.
57 Enns, "Love's Limit," 40, emphasis mine.

other and the resultant need for the containment of each of the parties in a loving relation. The woman, according to Irigaray, "needs to be situated and valued, to be *she* in relation to her self," rather than just being a self in relation another.[58] Having framed the issue in this way, she writes: "What we need is to discover how *two* can be made which one day could become a *one* in that third which is love."[59] As two subjects unify into a single relation, a third thing is produced or introduced: love. The question remains, how can two unify without one subsuming the other?

Irigaray's solution to this problem is to impose a grammatical intervention between two lovers, alternatively rendering the phrase "I love you" as "I love *to* you." Highly relevant for understanding maternal love in a way that fosters the independence and well-being of the child, this "to" preempts and disallows a reduction of a person to an object, instead securing the maintenance of two intentionalities and preserving the possibility of reciprocity.[60] Irigaray writes that this "to" serves as the "site of non-reduction of the person to the object." Conversely, "I love you …, I order you, I instruct you, … always risk annihilating the alterity of the other, of transforming him/her into my property, my object, of reducing him/her to what is mine." The "to" further serves as a "barrier against alienating the other's freedom in my subjectivity, my world, my language."[61] Love, as third thing irreducible to the subjects in relation, guards against breaking down boundaries that would otherwise protect dual subjectivities.

Revisiting an earlier theme of mutual becoming, Irigaray maintains that offering freedom for the other to become herself requires that one extend the same freedom to oneself. Irigaray names the obligation one has to oneself by virtue of one's relationship to the other. "Being faithful to you requires being faithful to me. Does existing not mean offering you an opportunity to become yourself?"[62] Fiona Utley suggests that giving each other space and opportunity to become occurs when each individual is taken in by love as something separate from each individual and the couple that they constitute. She opines that love will "endure, not only if you facilitate my development

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[58] Luce Irigaray, *Elemental Passions,* trans. Joanne Collie and Judith Still (New York: Routledge, 1992), 3.
[59] Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 66.
[60] Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You: A Sketch of Possible Felicity in History,* trans. Alison Martin (New York: Routledge, 1995), 110-111.
[61] Irigaray, *I Love to You*, 110.
[62] Luce Irigaray, *To Be Two*, trans. Monique M. Rhodes and Marco F. Cocito-Monoc (New York: Routledge, 2001), 15.

and I yours, but as we are able to enfold each other into what this is."[63] The third thing of love, which transcends both partners, facilitates mutual independence and becoming.

Irigaray underscores that such independence is her objective when she writes on silence and subjectivity in a way that requires drawing the distinction between a prenatal and postnatal relationship between mother and child: "Listening to the other, sparing them some silent time, is respecting his or her breath, too. Only a mother breathes for her child. Once born, we all must, should, breathe for ourselves."[64] Although her purpose is not to discuss maternal love, her imagery of a child breathing independently of the mother supports the position that I am defending in this article. She elaborates on the efficacy of the lover's silence for the beloved: "I give you a silence in which your future—and perhaps my own, but *with* you and not *as* you and *without* you—may emerge and lay its foundation." This silence, she maintains, is the "primary gesture of *I love to you*. Without it, the 'to,' such as I understand it, is impossible."[65] Silence allows the beloved to develop herself independently of the one who loves her. Irigaray is clear that this silence is necessary for dual subjectivities when she writes that this silence is the "condition for a possible respect for myself and for the other within our respective limits."[66] In the absence of such silence, language would encumber freedom.[67] True relationship is possible just because dependence, and therefore domination, are precluded. The indirection underscores that one is to encourage the other's becoming without ultimately claiming responsibility for it. Love is a third thing that both parties relate to and help create, yet this love remains apart from each individual and therefore also remains to some degree out of their control and outside their sphere of ownership.

Love as Gift

In the remainder of this article, I will argue that theorizing maternal love as a gift rather than as a right enhances the freedom of both mothers and their children. As that which is offered from free will and not out of obligation, love as gift supports subjectivity. For Marion, whose work largely focuses on notions of the gift and givenness, it is constitutive of one's personhood that they

[63] Utley, "Trust and the Experience of Love," 183.
[64] Irigaray, *I Love to You,* 121.
[65] Irigaray, *I Love to You,* 117.
[66] Irigaray, *I Love to You,* 117.
[67] Irigaray, *I Love to You,* 117.

have the free will to love.[68] Claudia Welz holds that conceptualizing love as a gift affords understanding giving as a self-fulfillment that "edifies the self" and that it "receives in giving." Moreover, due to the abundance of gift, the self "receives new energy to give." She elaborates that giving "out of love does not involve purposeful giving-for-the-sake of, but rather the gratuity of a free gift given for nothing."[69] According to her, love as gift incorporates the notion that one receives as well and is "enriched by one's readiness to give."[70] Significantly, she observes that the "logic of gift leads into surplus rather than loss, or into surplus despite loss."[71] Part of why love as gift can function in this way, according to the Derridean perspective, is that the concept of gift opens up a space for alterity that is necessary for preserving the possibility of a love beyond economy.[72]

In a way helpful to the present argument, Kristeva theorizes the concept of the gift in terms of the maternal. Conceptualizing the mother's desire as a *pure gift,* she holds that this gift is not directed at the child but benefits the child in its excess—and helps the child to separate from the mother.[73] Rather than existing in an economy of exchange in which the anticipation of a particular response or of some kind of reciprocity encumbers the giving, "the gift, in its purity (outside of the logic of return), simply affords an *openness to the other.* It does not close, make present or grant being but opens up." This openness to the other "constitutes the lining of our being."[74] In other words, the gifting of the mother's love makes possible a particular kind of relationship to self, world, and other without definitively realizing it. Moreover, crucial to the concept of the gift is that the source is concealed,[75] further pointing to love as that which creates apertures affording development that continues indefinitely rather than as a closed system of exchange.

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[68] Jean-Luc Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity,* trans. Stephen E. Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 29.
[69] Claudia Welz, "Love as Gift and Self-Sacrifice," *Neue Zeitschrift Für Systematische Theologie Und Religionsphilosophie* 50, no. 3–4 (2008): 251.
[70] Welz, "Love as Gift and Self-Sacrifice," 250-251.
[71] Welz, "Love as Gift and Self-Sacrifice," 250.
[72] David Newheiser, "Eckhart, Derrida, and the Gift of Love," *The Heythrop Journal* 56, no. 6 (2015): 1017. NB: According to Derrida, "if there is gift, the given of the gift … must not come back to the giving … It must not circulate, it must not be exchanged, it must not in any case be exhausted, as a gift, by the process of exchange" (Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 7).
[73] Kathleen O'Grady, "Melancholia, Forgiveness, and the Logic of *The Gift*" in *Women and the Gift: Beyond the Given and All-Giving*, ed. Morny Joy (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013), 106-107.
[74] O'Grady, "Melancholia, Forgiveness, and the Logic of *The Gift,*" 107.
[75] Jean-Luc Marion writes that a "gift without relation to any giver no longer bears the mark of any process of givenness, and thus appears as alien to what is given in it. Paradoxically, a gift truly given disappears as given, too. It

Love as Both Task and Gift

While love is partially within our control, it also blossoms into something that exceeds it. Depicting loving relations as a willed opening up to the other that can consummate in a mode of relating outside our complete control, one scholar summarizes the Derridean perspective: we must continue to "give as best we can, but the fact that our efforts are insufficient opens the prospect of something better than what we are able to realize of ourselves. Love represents such a beyond."[76] This suggests that love is both task and gift. For my purposes here, I distinguish task from gift by relying on the Kantian distinction between practical love (actions) and pathological love (feeling). While actions can be duties, the emotions that ideally attend those actions, and which may result from them, cannot be commanded. Given this, the full experience of love cannot be claimed as a right, which would constrain women's freedom and erroneously imply that they have complete control to realize it, yet it does call for their agentive participation. In order to make this case, I draw on Søren Kierkegaard's formulation of love. For him, as for Irigaray, love exists separately from the two that love each other as a third thing.[77] Positing love as a third and separate entity between the two persons in a relationship of love might function similarly for Kierkegaard as it does for Irigaray by ensuring that two people do not become falsely dependent upon each other in an inauthentic mode of love.

It is critical to Kierkegaard's view that, in a loving relationship between two people, their distinct identities remain intact as "I" and "you," but at the same time he is emphatic that love cannot admit the presence of "mine" and "yours."[78] Love, when it is truly such, resists the ability to be claimed as "mine." The change that takes place when true love is present is so radical in upsetting notions of ownership by blurring the divisions between each person's claims, that Kierkegaard deems it a "revolution."[79] Not just one, but both subjects must renounce claims to what is "mine" and "yours" if authentic love is to obtain. The "more profound the revolution, the

appears henceforth only as a *found* object: a thing, a being or an object, which is found there, in front of me, by chance and without reason, such that I may wonder what status I should grant it" (Jean-Luc Marion, *The Reason of the Gift,* trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 78).

[76] Newheiser, "Eckhart, Derrida, and the Gift of Love," 1018.

[77] Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love,* ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 121.

[78] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 265.

[79] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love,* 265.

more completely the distinction '*mine* and *yours'* disappears, the more perfect is the love."[80] Although Kierkegaard makes these assertions in the context of self-sacrificial and self-giving love that might appear problematic to feminists, I have argued elsewhere that his construction supports women pursuing their own projects as a common interest, rather than dissolving themselves in the agendas of others.[81] Moreover, for the purposes of my argument here, this conception of love maintains the freedom in love while illuminating how love precipitates into something sufficiently indefinite to problematize the making of claims upon it.

For Kierkegaard, love by its very nature eludes any tendency to make it transactional or economical. In fact, not only is each individual expected to see themselves as infinitely indebted to love,[82] one is to offer love as a gift that appears to be the property of the other.[83] Welz explains that this demands of us "not to make the other dependent on receiving."[84] Instead, Kierkegaard prescribes helping the other "to become himself, free, independent, his own master, to help him stand alone—that is the greatest beneficence."[85] With regard to maternal love, this notion of love as gift can work to encourage a child's independence from her mother. To construe maternal love as a right to be claimed implies an excessive dependence on the mother that could undermine the child's developing sense of self even while delimiting the mother's sense of freedom. To conceive of maternal love as gift is to empower the mother by the notion of giving,[86] and to expand the child's potential for increased independence.

Although Kierkegaard claims that one who loves ought to understand herself as a debtor, this only operates from a subjective standpoint (and ought to do so on both sides of the relationship) and the debt is to love itself as that which is infinite, rather than reducing love to a finite object that exists as "love in the one person and love in the other person" in way that would problematically facilitate comparison and support claims to entitlement.[87] From a Kierkegaardian point of view, it is possible that it is one's "duty to remain in love's debt" precisely because doing

[80] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love,* 266.
[81] Deidre Nicole Green, "A Self That is Not One: Kierkegaard, Niebuhr, and Saiving on the Sin of Selflessness" The Journal of Religion 97, no. 2 (2017): 169
[82] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love,* 252.
[83] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love,* 274.
[84] Welz, "Love as Gift and Self-Sacrifice," 252.
[85] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love,* 274.
[86] Welz, "Love as Gift and Self-Sacrifice," 257.
[87] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love,* 182.

so circumvents the temptation to enter into an economy of love. Welz contrasts Derrida's warning against the debt that results from the act of *receiving* love with Kierkegaard's depiction of love as a debt that arises from *giving*.[88] She sums up that for Kierkegaard, "love is that gift and that modality of giving and receiving, which alone allows us to give without self-congratulation and to receive without entering into the cycle of possible restitution."[89] Although Kierkegaard anticipates an agentive relation to love, individuals ought not to have an overdeveloped sense of control over it since for him, love's source remains hidden and "unfathomable" even to the person who experiences it and seeks to externalize it.[90] To be sure, each person ought to consider it her duty to love through practical actions, but the experience of loving feelings is a gift both to the beloved and the one who loves, the source of which remains hidden.

The Role of Duty within the Mother-Child Relationship

My use of Kierkegaard here is complicated by the fact that he does in fact argue that love is something that can be claimed, including by children from their parents. He writes: *"Your friend, your beloved, your child, or whoever is an object of your love has a claim upon an expression of it also in words if it actually moves you inwardly. The emotion is not your possession but belongs to the other; the expression is your debt to him, since in the emotion you indeed belong to him who moves you and you become aware that you belong to him."*[91] Kierkegaard specifies here that one has claims upon expressions of love, that is—practical love. On my view, what preserves freedom in the Kierkegaardian conception is the fact that it is the agent's own development of love that is primary: it is only after the feeling of love arises within the agent that it can be said to belong to the beloved. This is presumably because once love arises and is present between the two, the normal conceptions of what is "yours" and "mine" vanish. I take Kierkegaard to be speaking about what can be expected once pathological love has presented itself; he is not making the claim that one must generate pathological love on demand. On my reading, given the dual nature of love as both task and gift, this would prove to be an impossibility. Furthermore, Kierkegaard makes explicit

[88] Welz, "Love as Gift and Self-Sacrifice," 256.
[89] Welz, "Love as Gift and Self-Sacrifice," 256.
[90] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love,* 10.
[91] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love,* 12.

that love is only recognizable through its external manifestations and it is this practical love that serves as the focal point of his reflection.[92]

In these ways, Kierkegaard works to preserve freedom in love and further points to its unclaimability. It is helpful to look at Harry Frankfurt's notion of love and freedom in order to help unpack the relevance of Kierkegaard for the present argument. Holding that at its heart love is neither cognitive nor affective, Frankfurt maintains that love is volitional.[93] Since it is fundamentally associated with agency, love determines whether actions are or are not autonomous. Frankfurt agrees with Kant that the necessity of actions does not compromise the ability to perform them autonomously—their necessity actually proves to be conducive to autonomy. Yet, he disagrees that autonomy requires submission to duty. For Frankfurt, what makes actions autonomous is that they are performed out of love, regardless of whether or not they are in conformity with duty.[94]

This formulation does not negate the possibility of parental love being required as duty, but in his descriptive account of parental love, Frankfurt observes that he meets his children's needs out of love rather than duty. For him, there is no reason to invoke the moral law in this instance: "Parents are generally not concerned for their children out of duty, but simply out of love; and the love, needless to say, is not a love of duty but a love of the children."[95] Liao argues that duty and love may be simultaneous motivations and I do not deny this possibility.[96] However, where cultural pressures already place excessive pressure on women to conform to ideals of motherhood, the discussion of rights and duties may act as more of a buffer than a catalyst to love. Privileging the freedom of love over a duty to love in regard to the mother-child relationship can prevent women from feeling unduly burdened or constrained in relation to their children, which could actually create a hindrance to love that would not exist without it.

Barbara P. Solheim explores, and ultimately denies, that there can be a duty to love children. Relying on the Kantian distinction of practical and pathological love, she holds that while practical love can be a duty, the emotion that may or may not accompany it cannot be insofar as

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[92] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love,* 8.
[93] Harry G. Frankfurt, *Necessity, Volition, and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 129.
[94] Frankfurt, *Necessity, Volition, and Love,* 131.
[95] Frankfurt, *Necessity, Volition, and Love,* 140.
[96] Liao, *The Right to be Loved,* 127.

our emotions ultimately elude our absolute control.[97] Distinguishing between a responsibility to attempt to cultivate an emotion and a responsibility to succeed in so doing, Solheim importantly maintains that although one cannot be duty-bound to love, a duty-based parental morality could require a duty to try to love.[98] Pushing her view forward in light of the concepts of task and gift, I argue that the tasks of love are duties, but the feeling of love is a gift: we may work towards that gift by performing the tasks, which may create a situation that is conducive to the feeling of love, but it is not finally a matter of control and so ultimately we must remain at the mercy of the appearance of an external third.

What can be claimed as rights are the various aspects of care that lie within a person's control. Mullin similarly holds that loving children cannot be deemed a duty, although she accepts that emotions are not outside a person's control and are involved in duty-bound ways of relating such as developing trust, gratitude, and reciprocity of valuing. She claims that what is obligatory and "morally crucial" is to "make sustained efforts to think of and behave toward others in certain norm-governed ways." She explains that finding another endearing depends on more than one's own moral cultivation: "it also requires people to find themselves particularly in sync with or moved by others, and we differ enough from one another not always to be able to do so with any given other person."[99]

There are norm-governed ways in which mothers ought to relate to their children, and these practices may be regarded as loving, yet love itself eludes such normative constraints. Practices construed as loving and viewed as conducive to love may be considered tasks that are duty-bound, while a fuller experience of love, including the feeling of it, remains a gift that exists as an external third and as such cannot be made subject to constraint.

Feminist scholarship insists upon rethinking maternal love as something that is free and able to preserve dual subjectivities, requiring an openness in which each member of a relationship is vulnerable and can be moved by the other. Connecting responsibility with "response-ability," Oliver claims, serves as the foundation of personal subjectivity. Insofar as subjectivity is something to which people have a right, I argue that Oliver's notion of "response-ability" is what

[97] Barbara P. Solheim, "The Possibility of a Duty to Love," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 30, no. 1 (1999): 8.
[98] Solheim, "The Possibility of a Duty to Love," 12, 15.
[99] Amy Mullin, "Filial Responsibilities of Dependent Children," *Hypatia* 25, no. 1 (2010): 169-70.

can be claimed and therefore what qualifies as maternal duty. It is an obligation for a mother to be responsible and "response-able" because it is required for the attainment of the other's selfhood. Even as a child has a right to her mother's responsiveness and can make a claim on it, love is a third thing beyond the self and the other and therefore cannot itself be truly controlled and therefore neither demanded nor claimed. Claims that might be made on the maternal relationship, such as openness, vulnerability, responsibility, and "response-ability," are all features of a relationship that are conducive to the experience of love—and perhaps even creatively productive of the feeling of love—yet they are not identical to love. As that which remains unclaimable, love remains free and therefore capable of being realized in its most authentic form in which the subjectivity and freedom of both parties are able to flourish.

Conclusion

Making maternal love a duty proves to be constraining and is inherently unbalanced in terms of power and control. It may further inhibit the child's own development as an independent being who requires respect and some distance rather than to feel entitled to claim maternal love in a way that might suggest excessive dependence. Moreover, love cannot be a right that children can claim from their parents because love does not occur on demand. Maternal ambivalence provides support for the argument that maternal love may result from commitment and practice, rather than from duty. In addition, vulnerability and openness to the other within a loving relationship, when considered as matters of choice, are controlled by the mother and are neither innate nor the result of obligation. Once love arises, it does so as a third thing distinct from both individuals in the loving relationship, unifying them without subsuming one into the other.

To limit maternal love as something a child can claim from her mother is not only to compromise the mother's agency in problematic ways that exacerbate the undue and disempowering expectations placed on women, it further can work to limit the child's own agency by making her feel that she is dependent upon her mother's love for her flourishing. To do so would compromise a truly authentic and efficacious love, which otherwise works for the independence of the beloved by making itself inconspicuous, even invisible. Working from a notion of love as gift, rather than right, affords both mother and child greater agency in relation to each other. It also preempts the establishment of modes of subordination to one another that make

the mother beholden to the child and make the child unnecessarily dependent upon the mother in ways ancillary to the practices of care that allow children to thrive. Maternal love is neither necessarily innate nor can it simply be willed into existence—what does lie in a mother's control is to seek to love through care practices that include empathy, respect, and so on.

In conclusion, there are many care practices (tasks) that are conducive to love arising that are rights children can claim, and this may include "response-ability" and openness from the parent, but the love itself remains distinct from these practices and does not fall under that category. Love is a gift, not just to the recipient, who as a result of this cannot claim it as her due, but also to the one from whom it emanates, who therefore cannot be duty-bound to offer it. Love remains a third thing that can be hoped for and worked towards through the tasks of love but not determined fully by either the one who bestows it or the one who receives it. As both task and gift, love can be aimed for by care practices deemed loving and these may be duties in parent and child relations, but the experienced emotion of love itself remains both elusive and untraceable, ultimately lying beyond our claims.

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Falling in Love and Breaking Up: Attribution Bias and the Perception of Responsibility

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Abstract: I argue that our tendency to self-attribute or 'take responsibility for' positive rather than negative events explains why we tend to experience romantic love as responsibility-preserving and painful break-ups (in many cases) as responsibility-undermining. This seems to be the case even though both experiences share similar phenomenological qualities, particularly lack of control and loss of psychological continuity. I contend that our asymmetrical perceptions of responsibility in positive versus negative cases can be explained as an effect of a properly functioning attribution-self-representation system, which generates differential attributions in the two cases. I suggest that the subjective perception of responsibility – supported by our attribution biases – might be relevant to theorizing about how we attribute responsibility to people. This implies that we should withhold blame from people with a pessimistic attribution style, and withhold praise from people with a narcissistic attribution style, as a way of bringing them closer to the average range. This is because the average degree of optimistic bias has adaptive value: it makes us happier and more functional. So, the subjective perception of responsibility and the objective reality of responsibility are intimately related. Finally, I show that gender influences self-attribution style, which has implications for how we should hold men and women responsible.

Keywords: responsibility, romantic love, control, narrative identity, attribution theory, agency enhancement theory.

1. Introduction

Most people tend to attribute positive events to themselves and negative events to external causes. That is, they tend to perceive themselves as being more responsible for positive than for negative events. This is exemplified in the experience of romantic love. Romantic love, according

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to Alain Badiou (2012) and Alain de Botton (2016), has an essential element of chanciness: we *fall* in love, we don't choose to love someone. Similarly, when we break up with someone, it can (depending on the circumstances) feel like an accident, a tragedy – something over which we have no control. Yet falling in love does not seem to threaten our feeling of being responsible – of being in control, of being a complete person – in the same way that breaking up can. This points to an asymmetry in how we perceive our responsibility: we feel more responsible for positive events than negative events (for falling in love than breaking up under infelicitous circumstances), even if both experiences have similar 'chancy' (or deterministic, as the case may be) qualitative features.

Why do some people take responsibility for positive events more than others? I will suggest that this is a function of a person's attribution-self-representation system, which generates a nexus of causal attributions and self-reflexive beliefs. Some people have a pessimistic attribution style and corresponding negative self-representation beliefs (especially people with depression); others have a self-aggrandizing attribution style and corresponding egoistic self-representation beliefs (especially narcissists); and neurotypical people (neither depressed nor narcissistic) make moderately optimistic attributions and moderately positive self-representation beliefs. Research shows that narcissistic individuals self-attribute successful outcomes more than less narcissistic individuals do (e.g., Stucke 2003; Brown 2013), people with depression self-attribute negative outcomes more than others (Rubenstein et al. 2016), while neurotypical people lie somewhere in the middle. The ordinary person's moderate degree of self-serving bias has adaptive value: it tends to facilitate happiness and social functioning. This is why ordinary people tend to live 'ordinary' lives, neither fraught with depression nor plagued by self-defeating narcissism.

Does a person's subjective perception of responsibility, produced by her attribution-self-representation system, have any implications for how we *ought* to think about responsibility in theoretical terms, or for how we *should* attribute responsibility in practice? It might, if responsibility attributions are supposed to influence people's behavior. On a forward-looking, 'agency enhancement account' (see Vargas 2013, McGeer 2013), it makes sense to think that our expressions of praise and blame should respond to a person's attribution style and self-representation beliefs, 'nudging' those beliefs toward the average if they're excessive in either direction.

In section 2 below, I will briefly present an account of responsibility, to be used further on

in the analysis. In section 3, I talk about how romantic relationships exemplify our tendency to take responsibility for positive events more than we do for negative events. In section 4, I suggest that this tendency can be explained by reference to an attribution-self-representation model of positive psychology. In section 5, I argue that a person's attribution-self-representation style has implications for how we should theorize about responsibility as an interpersonal practice. And in section 6, I highlight the intersections between gender and attribution style, and the implications of these intersections for agency-enhancing models of responsibility.

2. Responsibility

Philosophers use the word 'responsibility' in many different senses. Some of these senses imply that what we are responsible for depends on what we experience as authentic, under our control, and determined by our choices, as opposed to alien, uncontrollable, and imposed from without (whether by chance, coercion, or duress). David Shoemaker claims that on the 'attributability view' of responsibility, what we are responsible for are the traits, choices, and states of affairs that we would label as "authentic" as opposed to "alien" (2014: 120), while Fischer claims that on the 'control theory,' what we are responsible for are the traits, choices, and states of affair that are under our control or "up to us" (2012; cf. Scanlon 1998). Notably, whether a trait, choice, or state of affairs *appears to be* attributable to us or under our control depends on our attribution-self-representation style, which, in neurotypical people, represents positive states of affairs as 'ours' and 'chosen by us,' and negative states of affairs as alien and coerced. In narcissistic and people with depression, the attribution-self-representation system works very differently. Thus, our perception of our responsibility will depend heavily on our attribution style. This does not mean that whether we are responsible depends on our subjective psychology - but our *perception* of our own responsibility does.

Other theorists define responsibility as a system of reactive attitudes, such as blame and praise, which are justified by their propensity to enhance the agency of the recipient. Manuel Vargas' 'agency enhancement theory' is an example (2013). On this approach, whether one should hold someone responsible for a choice does not depend on whether one regards that choice as her own or under her control; it depends on how holding her responsible would affect her agency.

In what follows, I will argue that falling in love and breaking up often share similar phenomenal features incompatible with responsibility – such as chanciness, uncontrollability, and alienation – yet due to our attributional biases we don't take responsibility for both kinds of events equally. Furthermore, we *should not* take equal responsibility for both, because ordinary attributional biases are adaptive and healthy.

3. Love, break-ups, and asymmetrical perceptions of responsibility

The features that falling in love and breaking-up share – perceived loss of control and loss of psychological continuity – are in tension with dominant paradigms of responsibility, which link responsibility to control (e.g., Fischer 2012) and the possession of a persistent and coherent ('deep') self (e.g., Frankfurt 1871, Sher 2010). When we fall in and out of love, then, we should experience a disorienting loss of responsible agency. But only in the negative case – the break-up – do these features challenge our *feeling* of being a deep, continuous ego. This asymmetry, I submit, can be explained by an optimistic attribution bias found in neurotypical psychology: we tend to self-attribute positive events (like romantic love), and to externally-attribute negative events (like break-ups). We can see this asymmetry exemplified in some popular philosophical accounts of romantic love – specifically, Alain Badiou's (with Truong, 2012),[1] and Alain de Botton's (2016), to which I turn to now.

According to Badiou, one of the defining features of romantic love is that it emerges spontaneously out of a chance encounter. It cannot be "conceived… as an exchange of mutual favours, or … calculated way in advance as a profitable investment… love really is a unique trust placed in chance" (17). When we fall in love, it happens abruptly and unexpectedly, often as a result of a seemingly meaningless encounter; but this chance event quickly changes into something eminently meaningful – something that seems almost inevitable:

> *The chance nature of the encounter morphs into the assumption of a beginning. And often what starts there lasts so long, is so charged with novelty and experience of the world that in retrospect it doesn't seem at all random and contingent, as it appeared initially, but almost a necessity. That is how chance is curbed: the absolute contingency of the encounter with someone I didn't know*

[1] All subsequent references to Badiou are to 'In Praise of Love,' Badiou & Truong 2012.

finally takes on the appearance of destiny (Badiou: 42-43).

This may reflect our tendency to 'take responsibility' for the encounter; what initially seemed accidental and destabilizing in retrospect appears natural, voluntary, self-actualizing. Another salient feature of romantic love is that the self is transformed: the lover no longer sees the world from the perspective of an atomistic agent, but from the perspective of a 'duality'. "Love isn't simply about two people meeting and their inward-looking relationship: it is a construction, a life that is being made, no longer from the perspective of One but from the perspective of Two" (Badiou: 29). This marks a fundamental change of self-conception: you no longer live for yourself only, but for the intertwined interests of a couple. Your interests, values, and commitments are, not exactly *subsumed* into, but *mediated* through, those of your partner. This is a transformative experience.

These features of the phenomenology of falling in love are in tension with dominant paradigms of responsibility, which focus on *control* and *continuous narrative identity*. Chanciness conflicts with control; and radical self-transformation conflicts with self-continuity – with the persistence of a stable ego through time. If we were kidnapped and brainwashed, we would feel that our responsibility had been undermined by hostile external forces, as Robert Mele describes futuristic 'manipulation cases' (Mele 1995). Not so when we fall in love; we feel no less responsible than before. Yet oddly, the salient features of these two experiences – loss of control and self-transformation – are the same. Only in the negative case do they harm our self-conception.

Here's a possible objection to this conception of love. Maybe you think that you could choose a romantic partner on the basis of reasons, weighing the pros and cons of the person's various qualities, as you might order a meal from a restaurant menu. This would cancel out the disorientation and bewilderment that accompanies falling in love 'by accident.' But, according to Badiou, such a scenario (choosing on the basis of a rational decision procedure) is anathema to romantic love: it eliminates the risk that makes love meaningful and transformative; it reduces 'falling in love' to a mundane market transaction, something akin to taking out an "insurance policy" (9). Buying an insurance is, of course, an eminently responsible thing to do; but when it comes to romantic love, it defeats the purpose. *Love can't be responsible.* By its very nature, it is an adventure and a risk. Now, we might rationally decide whether or not to marry someone, and whether or not to have children with someone, but that's not how we fall in love. We don't choose,

we *fall*. It seems to be built into the modern western conception of romantic love (if not all conceptions) that falling in love is not exactly irrational (i.e., against reason), but *a*-rational (i.e., not decided on the basis of reasons). Love can coincide with reasons but cannot stem from them. Ordinary people tend to associate romantic love with excitement and sexual arousal. For a more 'rational' emotion one could look at companionate love instead (Brogaard 2015).

Now consider the flip side: breaking up with someone. Badiou doesn't write much about break-ups. He does say that "everybody knows that deciding to break off such love, particularly unilaterally, is always a disaster, whatever the excellent reasons put forward to support such a move" (46). And I think this is right inasmuch as breaking up is often the opposite of falling in love: a transformative disaster, something that harms your self-conception. Some break-ups are rational – for example, if your partner is abusive. In that case, there are very sensible reasons for breaking up. But other times, break-ups have similar experiential qualities to falling in love: they seem unreasonable and random, precipitated by contingencies or accidents beyond our control – an unanticipated series of unfortunate events. Or they can be brought about by a betrayal that calls into question whether the relationship was ever 'real' in the first place. In either case, the break-up can have the quality of what existentialists call 'the absurd': it resists sensible explanation, destroys meaning, shatters the very system of values that were constructed and solidified in relationship with the other. Similarly, a break-up can challenge one's sense of self as a stable ego continuing through time, a part of something bigger than oneself. That is, a break-up can undermine one's feeling of being in control and being a coherent psychological entity.

Other times, break-ups can happen because of psychological factors (seemingly) beyond one's control, such as an attachment disorder acquired in childhood. De Botton argues that we always marry the 'wrong' person because "we have all emerged from childhood with a bewildering array of disturbances that come into play when we try to get close to others. We can only ever seem normal to those who don't know us very well" (2016). When these developmental issues interfere with our adult relationships, they can feel like irresistible compulsions overpowering our will. Nonetheless, we can, says de Botton, bond with people in spite of our various "bewildering disturbances," provided that we are able to "tolerate differences with generosity," and we manage to find someone who can do the same. In some cases, however, personal differences can feel utterly insoluble, and this can give a break-up the appearance of an inevitability, though an utterly

unpredictable one. Desert-based theories of responsibility have a 'foreseeability' constraint, which rules out the possibility of being responsible for an unforeseeable outcome (see Fischer 2012). If so, then the impossibility of knowing another person prior to falling in love, and the impossibility of detecting subtle incompatibilities between the two of you, can defeat control, thereby defeating compatibility on the control model.

Falling in love and breaking up, then, can have similar experiential qualities: chanciness, lack of control, lack of self-continuity, self-transformation, unpredictability. But only in the negative case – the break-up scenario – do these qualities pose a threat to the phenomenal self. Only in the negative scenario do we feel helpless, impotent, diminished – qualities that are anathema to the perception of responsibility, the experience of being able to exercise control over one's life and the capacity to continue to exist as a whole person. While falling in love is like a rebirth or reconfiguration of the self, breaking up can be like a death. This is not just because the experience is unpleasant: root canals are unpleasant, but they do not threaten our sense of self. The abruptness, the loss of control, the loss of authenticity, are some of the properties that make the end of a meaningful relationship a personal tragedy. The identity that we inhabited with the other, that was *co-constituted* by the other, no longer exists. We are thrust into a world that does not make sense from the perspective of either a singularity – the identity we've abandoned - or a duality – the identity we've lost. We are forced, whether we like it or not, to adapt to being a different person, to finding a new way of being in the world and a new way of relating to others.

Why is there this asymmetry between our perception of responsibility for positive events versus negative events, for romantic attachments versus break-ups? Why do we experience love as enriching, and break-ups (at least, certain kinds of break-ups) as destabilizing, bewildering, defeating, even though the two experiences have similar responsibility-relevant features? I turn to this question in the next section.

4. Attribution biases, self-representation beliefs, and perceptions of responsibility

One way of explaining the relevant asymmetry is by appealing to attribution theory. Different people have different subjective perceptions of responsibility, and these seem to be tied to our attribution styles. Most people self-attribute, or 'take responsibility for,' positive events

more than negative events. There is research on this phenomenon (Mezulius et al. 2004),[2] but it can also be documented by a careful observer. Indeed, almost 4 centuries ago, Shakespeare remarked on this human disposition in 'King Lear':

> *This is the excellent frippery of the world, that, when we are sick in fortune – often the surfeit of our own behaviour – we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon and the stars; as if we were villains by necessity, fools by heavenly compunction.*

In other words, people tend to blame the world for bad things while taking credit for good things. This *self-serving bias* affects ordinary people's causal judgments. But it's not universal. People with depression exhibit the opposite bias: they tend to self-attribute negative more than they do positive events. For example, if a person with depression gets a bad referee report, she is more likely to think, "it's because I'm stupid," rather than, "it was a fluke" or "the referee didn't get the point." Anyone can lapse into a pessimistic attribution style in the face of adverse events that seem out of their control (Abramson et al. 1978). But this mindset is usually temporary. A distinctive feature of depressive psychology is that people with depression tend to assume their negative traits are internal, global, and stable: they are about the person, they affect all of the person's behaviors (not just specific behaviors), and they seem immutable (ibid). This makes people with depression susceptible to prolonged dysphoria, not just the circumstantial pessimism experienced by most people. Depression therefore tends to be particularly trenchant – just as happiness in ordinary people is fairly resilient.[3]

Attribution style is only part of this story, however. One's mindset – whether depressed or optimistic – is also influenced by factors such as self-esteem, memory bias, and self-standards: features of our 'self-representation schema'. A pessimistic attribution style actually predicts low self-esteem better than it predicts depressive symptoms, though the latter correlation is still significant (Tennen & Herzenberger 1987). This means that self-esteem plays a mediating role in depression. Also, people with depression tend to remember negative information about themselves more than they remember positive information (Greenier et al. 1999) – they have a pessimistic memory bias. And they tend to show major discrepancies between their actual self and their 'ideal self,' the person they think they ought to be. Thus, they hold themselves to inordinately

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[2] Mezulius et al. find through meta-analysis that most people exhibit some degree of self-serving bias.
[3] I am not saying that it's necessarily *better* to be a neurotypical person, but I will address the question of whether being non-depressed is adaptive on page 15.

perfectionistic standards, thinking things like, "I should be able to please everybody." These self-representation beliefs interact with their attributions in "an attribution-self-representation cycle, [such that] changes in either inevitably lead to changes in the other" (Bentall 2011: 5294-5). People with depression thus tend to have a combination of negative self-representations and pessimistic self-attributions, which reinforce one another, whereas neurotypical people tend to have more optimistic self-attributions and more optimistic self-representation beliefs, which hang together in a fairly stable equilibrium. Although a person's attribution-self-representation style can "change detectably over time" (Bentall 2011: 5303), it predicts overt behavior while it's present.

Attribution-self-representation theory can help to explain why the ordinary person's experience of responsible agency is strengthened by a new romance, but challenged by a painful break-up, even when the two experiences have similar phenomenological features, antagonistic to theoretical paradigms of responsibility. The explanation is that we are more inclined to 'take responsibility for' romantic relationships compared to break-ups (and their immediate aftermath), insofar as the former are seen as positive and the latter are seen as negative. Thus, even if both types of event seem 'chancy' (or determined, depending on the case), and even if both types of event disrupt narrative continuity, we might have an inbuilt inclination to accept the results of a romantic encounter as 'our own' and as voluntarily chosen, while rejecting an unforeseen break-up as alien and involuntary. That is, after entering a romantic relationship, a neurotypical person is likely to appraise it as something over which she is responsible, whereas in the aftermath of a painful break-up, she is more likely to attribute the event to external factors. This asymmetry may be caused by a broader disposition to attribute positive events to ourselves and negative events to externalities. So, even if the originating cause of a romantic relationship – a chance encounter – was completely out of our control, we might come to re-appraise the encounter and its downstream effects – the loving relationship – as attributable to our 'self' and our 'autonomous choice.' Not so with an unwanted break-up: we are likely to ascribe the painful end of a relationship and its after-shock to externalities, not our own choices and character traits. This outcome is predicted by attachment-self-attribution theory. Thus, this theory can be applied to romantic love and break-ups to explain the asymmetry in our perceptions of responsibility in each case (ceteris paribus). Both have the same objective features of non-responsibility (uncontrollability, self-alienation, chanciness), but they are experienced differently depending on whether the event is seen as positive or negative.

In contrast, people with depression might feel more responsible for a break-up and less responsible for a new romance. The phenomenological experience of romantic love of a depressed person, that is, might be different from the average person's. While the beginning of the relationship might feel like a fluke or a miracle – something external – the end of the relationship might feel like the person's own fault. If so, then the person with depression might have difficulty assimilating the new romantic relationship into her self-representation schema, and achieving the 'two-and-not-one' mentality described by Badiou. (She might have trouble taking responsibility for the relationship *qua* positive state of affairs). The person with depression might also have trouble recovering from a break-up because of a failure to externally attribute the negative event, thereby taking responsibility for the negative outcome.

Alternatively, she might generate external attributions for *both* events, in which case she's likely to have a generally deflated ego. That is, she might not be able to take responsibility for either the relationship or its demise – or for much of anything – resulting in self-alienation. The idea of a global responsibility deficit in persons with depression is, in fact, consistent with Freud's characterization of depression as a kind of ego depletion (1984), and with more recent associations between depression and symptoms of withdrawal, apathy, and avolition (Adams 2001).

There is a third possibility: someone might take *too much* credit for positive events and not enough for negative events. This person would perceive the beginning of a relationship as being her own doing, and the failure of the relationship as being the other person's fault. This type of person is a *narcissist*, in the sense that her attribution style reflects a vain and egoistic sense of her own self-importance. It's debatable whether the narcissist is capable of experiencing love, since narcissism is likely to impair one's capacity to invest in another person for that person's own sake, thereby achieving the duality and mutual investment central to romantic love. The narcissist, then, might be existentially alone, incapable of attaching to another person.

The tendency to take proportionally more credit – but not excessive credit – for positive events compared to negative events is common. And this is arguably why most people experience romantic relationships as responsibility-preserving (or responsibility-enhancing), even if romantic encounters – the causal origin of the romantic relationship – defeat control and narrative continuity; and this tendency also explains why we tend to experience painful break-ups as responsibility-undermining, even though - in fact, precisely *because* - they have these

responsibility-defeating features. That is, our attribution biases explain our asymmetric perceptions of responsibility for relationships versus break-ups.

Interestingly, on some philosophical accounts of responsibility, if we can 'trace' an event back to a non-voluntary causal origin, we are not responsible for the outcome (e.g. Fischer 2012; Vargas 2005). This doesn't seem to hold for romantic love, however, because even if we can't take responsibility for the 'chancy' causal origin of love, we tend to take responsibility for its upshot – the romantic relationship. This seems to be because, when it comes to evaluating positive states of affairs such as romantic relationships, we don't see external causation or lack of control as responsibility-defeating. However, when evaluating negative states of affairs like break-ups, we do: we find external causation to be troubling *only in the negative case*. This perception, of course, is not a question of objective metaphysics – about whether agents have contra-causal powers or some other special metaphysical status (see Kane 1985). It is a question of *subjective perspective*. But subjective perspective might be relevant to 'holding responsible' in an objective sense, if praise and blame are supposed to promote functional behavior. I will discuss this in more detail in the next section.

Now, whether the average attribution style is 'right' is a fraught question. The fact that it is a bias reveals that it is epistemically flawed: it does not track objective reality. It reflects a prejudicial favoritism for oneself as the cause of positive occurrences but not negative ones. Arguably, the perspective of the person with depression is the more objective one: maybe it is right to think that we are not responsible for romantic relationships, since they stem from a chance encounter. Maybe we are actually not responsible for anything – which is a position held by some incompatibilists ('hard determinists'). Interestingly, people with depression are known to exhibit 'depressive realism': the tendency to make (depressingly) accurate self-appraisals (see Bantall 2011: 16643). This might make their perspective more accurate: they are better at objectively assessing themselves relative to others. But these questions about objectivity, metaphysics, and epistemic authority are, in an important sense, beside the point. Whether or not the ordinary person's self-serving bias is 'objective' (or metaphysically sound, or what have you), there's no doubt that it is *adaptive.* That is, it promotes subjective happiness and social functioning. There is good reason, then, to promote this mindset. And this means that there is good reason to promote attribution biases that support this mindset.

In relation to this, it is also notable that people with depression and narcissists, according to what was said above, might not be able to experience romantic love (at least not to the fullest extent). People with depression might have trouble assimilating the relationship into their self-conception (due to pessimistic biases that prevent them from 'taking responsibility' for positive events). Narcissists, on the other hand, might be practical solipsists – they might not be able to bond with others and incorporate others into their ego. If so, then both biases are antagonistic to love. Thus, if we value romantic love and wish to promote it, we have a pragmatic reason to promote the average propensity for optimistic bias. So our responsibility attributions – praise and blame – should aim to promote the average (functional) level of self-serving bias. I will expand on this thought in the next section.

5. 'Real' responsibility?

What, if anything, does all of this have to do with whether someone *is* responsible? I've been talking for some time now about love and the perception of responsibility. But perceptions aren't real: they are mental representations. Responsibility is a real thing, right? Either we are responsible for something or we are not. We might *feel* more responsible for positive than for negative events (unless we are depressed), but that has nothing to do with whether we are *really* responsible for anything – so the argument goes. There's some sense to this reasoning. If someone cuts me off in traffic, and I think that he's to blame, but the driver insists it wasn't his fault, surely his subjective perspective can't decide the matter. Nor can mine. This is trivially true: objective questions of responsibility can't be decided by someone's subjective opinion. But this is separate from the question of whether subjective features of agents – features like attributional biases and self-representation beliefs – can be *relevant* to whether someone is an apt target of praise or blame, objectively speaking. Most theorists, in fact, assume without hesitation that the psychological properties of agents – their capacities, or their quality of will – are the defining features of responsibility. People are responsible just in case they have these properties. It's not especially controversial, then, to suppose that a person's psychological properties can affect her aptness for praise and blame. But it might be controversial to suggest that a person's *attributional biases* are relevant, since it's not clear that these states are related to a person's moral capacities in the right way. Yet, at least some philosophical theories – the ones that I take to be the most compelling –

seem to accommodate the idea that attribution biases *should* inform our praising and blaming policies and attitudes toward responsibility.

In particular, I think this idea fits nicely with Vargas' 'agency enhancement theory' (2013), a forward-looking account on which responsibility attributions (praise and blame) are 'fitting' just in case they're likely to enhance the target's moral agency. Roughly, we are meant to blame or praise people in such a way as to influence them to be better people. On this view, it's compelling to think that subjective attribution biases should be relevant to responsibility as an interpersonal practice, since these subjective biases and beliefs affect whether certain kinds of moral address are likely to be motivationally resonant, and thus whether they're fitting. This is an *objective* matter, since it's objectively true that some moral reactions will be more effective than others.

Here's how attribution theory interacts with agency enhancement theory, in my view. If someone has a typical attribution-self-representation system, the person is probably pretty functional, as far as that particular system goes. (There might be cognitive deficits elsewhere, but we can set those aside). If someone is functioning perfectly well, we have no reason to coax her to change her attribution style and self-representation beliefs. If she falls in love or experiences a break-up, we can accept her appraisal of the situation and support her adaptive self-attribution biases in both cases.

But when addressing a person with depression, the fitting response is to be liberal with praise and conservative with blame, inasmuch as people with depression have an excessively pessimistic attribution style and low self-esteem. They already blame themselves more than is healthy. Thus, if a person with depression takes 'too much' responsibility for a break-up, and suffers a loss of resiliency, control, and narrative coherence, we ought to encourage her to 'externalize' the break-up and take more responsibility for positive aspects of the event or relationship.

In addressing narcissistic people, however, the opposite policy is fitting: we should be conservative with praise and liberal with blame, to discourage their excessive egocentrism. We should encourage the narcissist to take more responsibility for the break-up, and less responsibility for positive features of the relationship. On the agency enhancement view, the reason for withholding blame from people with depression and withholding praise from narcissists (relatively to the general population) is that depression and narcissism are antagonistic to adequate

functioning – in particular, to the adaptive functioning of the attribution-self-representation system. Depression is antagonistic because it can, if severe, cause subjective distress, dysfunction, volitional deficits, excessive shame, relationship difficulties, and so on. Narcissism is antagonistic to adaptive functioning because it prevents people from caring about other people's interests and investing in people's projects. Both attribution styles, then, impair agential functioning, albeit in different ways. People with depression might not be able to undertake moral projects or support others' moral projects due to volitional deficits, whereas narcissists may have no interest in engaging in moral projects due to global egoism.

An agency enhancement account recommends that we discourage these extreme tendencies. It counsels that we address people in ways that positively affect their attribution-self-representation system, prodding their biases toward the median. Doing this will enhance their functioning and therefore their ability to pursue projects of value.

It's interesting to note that we do, as a matter of fact, tend to suspend or modify our normal blaming responses toward people with depression. Philosophers have commented on this, and while there is disagreement, there is also meaningful consensus. For example, W. M. Martin argues that "explicit moral language is never appropriate during therapy" (2012: 39), which suggests that full suspension of blame is fitting for psychotherapy service users. Duff Waring counters that it might be helpful to hold service users responsible for certain things, though not in an "excessive, harsh, [or] severe" way (2012: 46). This seems to imply that, while full suspension of the reactive attitudes[4] would be gratuitous, there's good reason to refrain from adopting our normal blaming responses toward people with extremely pessimistic biases and depressive tendencies. Since 'holding responsible' encompasses a plethora of reactive attitudes, including praise and approbation, Duff's view seems right: surely we should not suspend *praise* from all therapy service-users. Martin, then, is wrong if he means to suggest that *every* manner of 'holding responsible' is off-limits in therapy. But it's interesting that Martin and Duff fully agree that we should, at a minimum, attenuate our *blaming* responses toward people with depression, which is consistent with an agency enhancement account, on which blame is sensitive to attribution style. Duff and Martin don't say much about praise *per se*, but, using the pragmatic grounds they offer

[4] See Strawson 2008 for an account of the reactive attitudes as central to our moral practice. These attitudes include praise, blame, resentment, gratitude, approbation, and disapprobation.

for withholding blame (i.e., it is counter-therapeutic for some service-users), we can extrapolate that we ought to attenuate our normal *praising* responses toward people with narcissistic traits (e.g., exaggerated self-importance), since their self-regard is excessive. This supposition fits with the agency enhancement theory of responsibility, and with an outcome-based approach to psychological therapy.

Now, I think it's a reasonable conjecture that our reactive attitudes naturally (i.e., implicitly and automatically) respond to people's attribution styles, because they evolved to respond differentially to different expressions of attribution bias (to depression and narcissism, for instance). If so, they would naturally tend to function this way whether we realize it or not. But even if this evolutionary story is wrong, there are compelling pragmatic reasons to think that we *should*, if possible, use our knowledge of attribution theory to try to respond differentially to different attribution-self-representation styles, as this strategy would help us push people in the direction of better functioning. Being functional can help people pursue prosocial (moral) projects and relationships.

6. Gender and self-attribution styles

There are notable gender implications for this theory. There is evidence that narcissism tends to be higher in men than in women (Grijalva et al. 2015), and that women are twice as likely to experience depression as men (Albert 2015). This means that there may be average gender differences in the attribution styles of men and women. As a result, in the absence of any specific biographical information, it may be a good general strategy to attribute less blame to women in the aftermath of a break-up, and more blame to men. More broadly, it may be a good general strategy to give more praise to women and less to men, on average, knowing that women are more prone to depression, and therefore more prone to pessimistic self-appraisals. That said, gender is a defeasible heuristic, which doesn't take into account specific differences between individuals. Still, if we are not familiar with a person's psychological profile, this could be a useful heuristic for deciding how best to hold the person responsible until we become better acquainted with the individual's dispositions.

Self-attribution theory also has implications for the responsibility attributable to men and

women in situations of intimate partner violence (IPV), which affects women more severely than men (with one in three women experiencing severe violence from an intimate partner compared to only one in seven men [NCADV 2011; WHO 2017]). Victims of IPV show higher levels of self-blame, and high self-blame correlates with post-traumatic stress disorder and depression (Levin 2011). Thus, women, who already exhibit higher average levels of depression, are more likely than men to experience severe intimate partner violence, and those with higher levels of self-blame are more likely to experience adverse psychological consequences that could impair their life prospects and future wellbeing.

According to the proposed model of responsibility (which is sensitive to considerations about self-attribution style), women in abusive relationships should be held responsible in such a way as to decrease their depression and enhance their self-efficacy and psychological wellbeing. Rather than encouraging them to identify with the abusive partner (as a neurotypical person would normally identify with a genuine loving partner), we should emphasize that the relationship is *not* part of their deep self, that the abusive partner is *not* a positive part of their self-conception, and that they lack full responsibility in the relationship, but can regain responsibility by leaving it. We should also avoid blaming the person, as blame increases depression, and people in abusive relationships are already high in depression and self-blame. On a therapeutic model of responsibility, it would be preferable to *praise* the person for her resilience and capacity for growth, rather than blaming her for any features of the relationship.[5]

7. Final remarks

I have argued that romantic love exemplifies our tendency to self-attribute positive rather than negative experiences, and I have explained this tendency as an expression of a properly functioning attribution-self-representation system. I have argued that a moderate amount of self-serving bias is healthy, and therefore we should not discourage people from manifesting it. Thus, we should not blame or praise people for moderately over-identifying with positive romantic experiences and moderately externalizing unpleasant break-ups, inasmuch as this attribution bias has adaptive value. I have also shown how depression, or an overly pessimistic attribution style,

[5] These are, again, generalizations. Familiarity with a person allows us to make more specific and fine-grained responsibility attributions in light of the person's psychological profile.

and narcissism, or an overly optimistic attribution style, might impair the agent's ability to form romantic bonds and invest emotionally in other people. When there is impairment, we should respond differently to depression and narcissism, so as to positively shape the person's attribution-self-representation system. The moral enhancement theory of responsibility coheres with the view that our interactions with others should regulate their psychological dispositions in ways that improve their agency.

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Love, not the Family

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Abstract: I propose a speculative, debunking explanation for the widespread tendency to attribute special value to family relationships. Instead, I suggest, the value of family relationships between adults flows from the same source as the value of intimate relationships between people who are not related by kinship: that of love. This is important because social expectations and (contested) pieces of legislation often privilege family over non-family close relationships, and often seek to preserve family relationships that, if my suggestion is correct, would be better dissolved. Moreover, if love is the source of value of all intimate relationships, this can help reframe debates such as that concerning same-sex marriage in more constructive ways.

Keywords: love, family, commitment, value.

We often assume that family relationships, even with second or third degree relatives, have a special kind of value that other intimate relationships, such as friendships with non-family members, lack. I want to challenge this belief and suggest that, ultimately, the value of friendship and kinship alike flows from the same source: that of the love that bounds people. This, as I explain in due course, is part liberating and part threatening. A few terminological clarifications: I am talking about love in its broad sense, beyond the usual divides between companionate and passionate love, love for parents or for children, etc. I assume that emotional attachments to others play a huge role in our wellbeing[1], making close relationships indispensable to the leading of a good life. When I talk about "friendship", I refer here to all close relationships based on affection and intimacy that, unlike family relationships, are chosen, rather than given. (Understood in this way, friendship and family relationships obviously intersect insofar as we choose whom to marry.

[1] See, for instance, the large literature on attachment theory, originated in the work of John Bowlby (1968-1980).

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But this sense of friendship is a mere stipulation made for the sake of analytic clarity: one can, and often is, friends with one's family members. And, as it should become clear by the end of the article, I believe friendship is the ideal form of family as well as non-family relationships.)

I will shortly explain why it is important to acknowledge that friendships and family relationships have the same kind of value. But, first, here is a speculative explanation of why common-sense morality often attributes a special kind of value to family relationships: because we choose friends, but not relatives, the bonds with the latter can be taken as a given. Moreover, relationships with family members seem more impervious to change than friendships, especially in social contexts in which the family is a much-respected institution, and which impose high costs on individuals who fail to respect its norms. This caters to a psychological need for security: as long as we are part of a family, we can expect not to be abandoned – not no matter what, but almost no matter what. It is easy to rationalize the comfort of security by attributing special value to family relationships. I will not defend the accuracy of this speculation. It seems to align well with the fact that we humans depend on others for survival during our unusually long childhood. It is also in line with sociobiological views explaining the historical importance, for general individual flourishing, of belonging to small groups.[2]

The security provided by family relationships is amplified by the fact that relatives have particular social roles: it is not only that we do not get to choose, or lose, our relatives – with the exception of spouses – but they come into our lives with a set of pre-determined norms that regulate our interaction with them. These norms range over many aspects of family relationships: how to treat one's parents, children, siblings and more distant relatives, who can marry whom and how many parents a child may have. Most remarkably, it is customary to think that relationships with our relatives involve special obligations – obligations that are not grounded in any contracts or promises, implicit or explicit, that we have ever made. For instance, in many societies there is an expectation that one should give hospitality to a cousin or sister-in-law independently of whether we have a loving relationship with those individuals. Sometimes these norms take a legal turn: one example is a piece of legislation that sanctions obligations to support one's elderly parents financially and even emotionally. The Chinese government has recently modified the Law of Protection of Rights and Interests of the Aged, to require adult children to visit or keep in touch

[2] See, for instance, Edward Wilson (1978).

with their elderly parents for the sake of the latter's emotional wellbeing. Failure to comply entails risk of being sued. An article published by New York Times in 2013 reported that:

> *On the same day the new law went into effect, a court in the eastern city of Wuxi ruled that a young couple had to visit the wife's 77-year-old mother — who had sued her daughter and son-in-law for neglect — at least once every two months to tend to her 'spiritual needs,' as well as pay her compensation.*[3]

Another example is adoption legislation. The general default – in legal terms as well as in terms of social expectations – is that children are raised by their biological parents, whether or not this is in the best interest of the child[4]. Adoption, especially when it involves childrearing by people other than the child's blood relatives, is often represented by popular culture as a second best. In addition, in some legislatures relatives have legal priority when it comes to adoption even if this is clearly detrimental to the wellbeing of the child. For example, in Romania, until 2018, a child could not be legally put up for adoption without the written consent of the child's relatives up to the fourth degree of kinship[5]. The state had to wait for at least one year before clearing the adoption procedure in case the child's parents or other relatives cannot be identified, or refuse to cooperate. In the rest of this essay, I set aside the issue of the special value that children derive from having committed and caring adults, whether or not genetically related. This is because the case of children is special: unlike adults, children are dependent on other people's care, and love is only one of the things that they need from their relationships with those who rear them. A significant part of good child-rearing is continuity in care[6]. This provides a strong reason why the norms regulating family relationships with children should be grounded in more than the love that children receive in well-functioning families, namely in what is good for them overall. The fact that the value of relationships with children is more complex does not as such provide support for upholding traditional family norms: longitudinal studies of US lesbian families indicate that children raised in such families are comparable to children raised in heterosexual families in terms

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[3] Edward Wong (2013).

[4] One example is cases of custody disputes won by estranged genetically related parents against adoptive parents to which the child is securely attached, in spite of judges expressing the belief that the decision goes against the child's interest. See Norvin Richards (2010.)

[5] Ministerul Muncii și Justiției Sociale (2018).

[6] Indeed, this is what may make child-rearing in families so valuable in the first place. See, for instance, Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift (2014).

of psychological and social development, and experience lesser levels of abuse[7]. Indeed, empirical research found no significant differences in outcomes for children from same-sex versus heterosexual families[8]. And, all things considered, it may be better for children to have three, or more, adults co-parenting them than only two[9].

Here is one reason to care about the question of whether family relationships have special value: if they do have such value, then disrespecting the norms that govern them, and opposing the codification of such norms in law, jeopardizes something that is distinctively important. If, instead, family and friendship are valuable for the same reasons – for instance, as I contend, reasons of love – then there should be a presumption in favor of the same norms guiding both kinds of relationships, as well as the same (if any) laws regulating them.

In particular, it matters a great deal whether family bonds really have special value, since allegiance to some of the norms that govern them are invoked to oppose changes in traditional family structure. To take a prominent example, same-sex marriage and adoption are divisive political issues, affecting the rights of a large group of people. A fear that same-sex marriage disrupts family values feeds much of the opposition to it. Likewise, adoption by same-sex couples is criticized not only for its alleged negative impact on children, but also for its potential to confuse and thus undermine conventional family relationships. A UK survey from 2008 shows that 76% of those who opposed same-sex adoption worried it would lead to the breakdown of the traditional family.[10] The survey registered this as separate from the concern that children need both a female and a male parent (which was endorsed by 87% of those thinking that same-sex couples should not be allowed to adopt). Again, if the full value of the family derives from loving bonds, then knowing whether same-sex marriage would protect or undermine such bonds should settle the question about its desirability[11].

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[7] See, for instance, Nanette Gartrell, Carla Rodas, Amalia Deck, Heidi Peyser, and Amy Banks (2005).
[8] Jimi Adams and Ryan Light (2015).
[9] Daniela Cutas (2011) and Bill Cameron and Samantha Brennan (2015).
[10] Sara Gaines (2008).
[11] Which is separate from that of permissibility: most likely, adults have a right to engage in consensual relationships that set back their interests – including their interests in giving and receiving love.

So, do family relationships between adults have special value?[12] My argument that they don't takes the form of a debunking explanation: the belief in the putative special value of family relationships seems to rest on a confusion between a lower and a higher degree of commitment. Family relationships – as already noted with the exception of marriage – are not chosen, but given. Unless we take explicit steps to dissolve the relationship with them, our relatives are by default part of our life. Due to their given nature, we don't tend to evaluate, even implicitly, what we stand to gain or lose from the association with our relatives. The same sort of commitment is expected towards spouses, although marriage is an exception to family relationships not being chosen. In marriage – that is, by becoming part of the same family – spouses declare an intention to be there for each other for better and for worse rather than until someone who can be a better partner comes along. Relationships with other relatives are similar in structure, if not in intensity and content. And we typically count on our relatives to relate to us on the same terms. Although friendship presupposes a similar commitment between friends, this expectation is not socially enforced in the same way.

Being able to rely on others improves our lives immensely – at times, it can make the difference between a life worth living and a life not worth living. Yet, only a low degree of commitment, explored below, is necessary for this aim. This low degree of commitment is part and parcel of love, which means that it is not unique to the family but present in genuine friendships in general. This level of commitment is enough for us to be able to enjoy the goods of loving relationships, including a sense of secure belonging. A higher degree of commitment – of the kind that is unlikely to be found outside the family – is not necessary for this purpose. In very poor, or illiberal, societies, where individuals can hardly survive, let alone flourish, without being embedded in secure relationships, there may be good reasons to value the high degree of commitment that social norms require of relatives. But in fairly prosperous societies, that protect individual liberties and economic entitlements, we are better off – sometimes prudentially, sometimes morally – without the high, "almost no matter what", levels of commitment. Acting on unconditional commitment detracts from individual flourishing and is incompatible with moral demands, and therefore is far from having obvious value.

[12] I develop this argument at length in Anca Gheaus (2012). After completing this article, I discovered that a similar argument (substituting "love" with "intimacy") is made by Diane Jeske (2018).

A lesser degree of commitment consists in ruling out, under normal circumstances, a cost-benefit analysis that would pose a threat of undermining the relationship. One may find richer, or more successful, or more cheerful, people with whom to share one's life, yet one will not abandon the people to whom one is committed in order to pursue the "better" ones. This type of commitment is also to be found in many true – that is, loving – friendships. Surely, not all friendly relationships are, nor is it clear that they should be, that committed – some are more casual, without necessarily being unloving for this reason. And it is not always clear when a casual relationships has evolved into a committed friendship, since the transition is often gradual and not marked by formal expressions of commitment. But, once connected by the bounds of genuine and deep affection, friends are unwilling to desert each other for the sake of "better" friends. Just like loving spouses, they are not even preoccupied – outside times of serious crisis perhaps – by the net advantage they derive from being part of the relationship.

There are, however, situations when only a very high degree of commitment can preserve close relationships. First, there are cases when the misery caused to one party would ultimately dissolve relationships characterized by the lesser level of commitment that is constitutive of love. Love, or at least the desire to continue the relationships with a beloved, can be eroded by enough unhappiness experienced over a sufficiently long time. Family relationships, on the other hand, can and often do endure in spite of (even mutual) misery; they do so not in virtue of affection and desire for the other's company, but in spite of their absence. A crucial question, then, is why an individual would find it desirable to remain in a relationship from which love is gone, or seriously compromised. This is particularly difficult to see in this time and age, when people do not – or should not – depend on particular relationships for survival. More likely, everybody's mid- and long-term prudential interests are well-served by the dissolution of such relationships; dissolution provides an opportunity for individual change when needed, and for the pursuit of better relationships.

Further, an "almost no matter what" level of commitment protects relationships against dissolution not only for prudential, but also for weighty moral reasons. To be committed to someone in this strong sense indicates the willingness to remain attached to that person in spite of grave conflicts such as differences in character or moral commitments, and even in the face of one party engaging and persisting in wrongdoing. The price for preserving the relationship is, in this

case, sharing one's life and oneself with people whom one considers blameworthy and who do not intend to change. In extreme cases, the price is one's own moral integrity. It is true that many families prize staying together in such circumstances. The abusive spouse, the racist uncle, the manipulative cousin are tolerated "because they are family" by people who would not tolerate lesser failings from their best friends. Moreover: groups of people that are not necessarily related by blood can "become" a family – that is, see themselves as being a family – when they enter relationships based on this unconditional level of commitment; one (extreme) example is the Mafia.

Friendships, too, can and should endure minor moral grievances, or more significant ones, when proper repentance and forgiveness follow the wrongdoing. But in normal circumstances it seems to be an internal requirement of friendship that we should distance ourselves from friends with whom we have irresolvable moral disagreements, or who refuse to offer reparation for wrongdoing. Unless we do so, we enable our friends to persist in their ways. Even in the few cases in which such persistence will serve them well, it will also significantly detract from the objective value of the friendship[13].

It is hard to see why it is good to have norms ascribing to us involuntarily acquired duties towards people with whom we don't necessarily have loving relationships. This is particularly so when the behavior prescribed by the duties is thought to be fully valuable only when performed out of inclination[14] - as is the case with the above example of filial duties in China. As such, this is a good reason – supplementing many other good reasons – to want states that can ensure individuals' material independence from others. When, for instance, elderly people don't need to rely financially on their grown-up children for decent care during the old age, they can more easily cultivate relationships based on genuine affection.

It is equally difficult to see what can make it desirable to remain close with adults with whom it would not be morally acceptable to stay friends. The convention that ties adult family members can surely appease our – perhaps, instinctual, and uncontrollable – fear of being abandoned. Yet,

[13] Following Aristotle, the value of friendship is often understood in moralized terms, as a concern not merely for the wellbeing but also for the character of one's friend. See Julia Annas (1977).
[14] In Gheaus 2017, I argue at length that the goods of loving relationships have full value only when provided out of inclination, rather than duty or commitment.

its abolition holds the promise of a freedom that is necessary for the pursuit of relationships that are based on love.

Debunking explanations like the one I offer here cannot, as such, settle disagreements. At most, they can pave the way towards a consensus or at least a better understanding of the disagreement. But a debunking explanation does something to shift the burden of proof on those who believe that family relationships *do* have special value. Until and unless a convincing argument is produced, there is no reason to believe that the family has any special worth which sets it apart from other close, loving relationships. A practical conclusion is that we shouldn't worry about threats to the (traditional) family unless they are also threats to adults' ability to build and maintain loving relationships, or to children's wellbeing. Do emerging institutions such as same-sex marriage or adoption by same-sex parents undermine the family? It remains to be seen, but, even if they do, this is not problematic: it is love, not the family, that makes relationships valuable. If so, then "family" should perhaps become an honorific name for "particularly close loving relationships"[15].

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[15] This is how I understand, at the legal level, Elizabeth Brake's recent (2012) proposal that we should "minimize" marriage.

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Contemporary Western Love Narratives and Women in TV Series: A Case Study

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Abstract: This paper documents continuities and shifts in love stories unfolding in contemporary North-American TV series. We present results from a 2015-2017 case study on the Quebec TV series *La Galère* (2007-2013), showcasing four women in their forties as they deal with love relationships and intimate life. Based on the analysis of the four protagonists' love narratives and of the specific challenges they face when dealing with love, we discuss the features of love as they emerge from the narratives and the temporality of love that structures them. While the scholarly literature generally posits two coexisting, yet concurring love semantics (traditional or romantic *vs.* modern or partnership), our analysis of the love narratives in *La Galère* highlights a conception of love integrating tradition with modern reflexivity, idealization with scepticism, romanticism with pragmatism. As to the temporality of love, our research found a similar synergy between traditional and modern motives, which structures a temporal unfolding mixing circularity and linearity. These multiple references are mobilized by the main characters of the TV series to manage conflicting ambitions and to perform relationship work with *regard* to relational patterns that still entail a heavier workload and higher costs for women.

Keywords: love, gender, intimacy, TV series, semantics.

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Introduction: narratives, love, and social change

Previous research has documented the transformation of love ideals and narratives in the late 20th century and towards the beginning of the 21st (Cancian 1987; Swidler 2001; Illouz 2012). The aim of the paper is to document observable continuities and shifts in love stories that unfold in contemporary TV series. More specifically, we discuss the features of love as they emerge from these narratives, and the temporality of love that the narratives structure. Our focus will be on the embodiment of love by main female characters, following accounts of love ideals being represented as gender specific in contemporary cultural productions (Evans 2003; Jackson 1993; Morin 2012). Feminist scholarship and social movements – among which we can count the recent #metoo movement – have demonstrated that love, sex and intimacy present specific challenges for women. These challenges are connected to power imbalance, unequal work division, and cultural biases. Contemporary TV series (from the 1990s on) have integrated the outcomes of this social reflexivity into the love stories that they are telling (Morin 2017, 2014b, 2012; Lavigne *et al*. 2013). Following theoretical and methodological accounts from Plummer (1995), Luhmann (1993, 1982) and Reinhardt-Becker (2015, 2005), we consider love narratives as both responses and contributions to social transformations, which can both go beyond the intimate sphere and also affect it. Thus, our analysis is situated on the level of love semantics (Luhmann 1982), yet involves a discussion of the connection between semantic change and social change. Narratives convey norms by drawing on a repertoire of available stories and by integrating new motives which elaborate questions and problems relevant to contemporary societies. Plummer (1995) has shown how shifts in sexual stories (e.g. rape stories, coming-out stories) are related to individual and collective ways to deal with challenges generated by social transformations. Our goal is to contribute to a similar sociological analysis of love stories as models for individual and social coping with the consequences of structural continuity and change in norms and in the way they apply to different categories of people (women, same-sex couples, etc.).

The paper presents data and analyses from a case study of the Quebec TV series *La Galère* (2007-2013). After summarizing love stories revolving around the four female protagonists, we discuss, on the one hand, the features of love emerging from these narratives, and, on the other, the temporality of love that these stories construct, and that further qualifies love's features. We will examine these semantic elements by connecting them to continuities and transformations of

contemporary Western societies in areas such as gender identities and arrangements, intimate bonds, and power relationships. While scholarly literature generally posits two coexisting, yet competing love semantics (traditional or romantic *vs.* modern or partnership), our analysis of the love narratives in *La Galère* highlights a conception of love integrating tradition with modern reflexivity, idealization with scepticism, and romanticism with pragmatism.

Context, research questions, theory

There is a long tradition of social sciences and humanities research on love semantics and narratives for which the main goal is to identify love paradigms across modern Western history. Generally speaking, scholarship on contemporary love paradigms distinguishes two main competing semantics: romantic love and partnership. Romantic love semantics characterizes love as an overwhelming passion (Jackson 1993) directed toward an individual (Leupold 1983), entailing a merger of individualities (Friedman 1998), resulting in an exclusive, long-term relationship which conflates feelings, sexuality and conjugality (Lenz 2005) – traditionally, marriage – and exceeds in importance every other project or relationship of the partners (Tyrell 1987). Since romantic love provides the greatest happiness in human life, a life deprived of this kind of love is barely worth living, thus the desire for it is seen as universal (Hahn 2008). Historically, romantic love semantics is associated with an individualization process (Luhmann 1982) revolving around autonomy, validation of the self through intimacy in opposition to the increasing anonymity of the outer world (Reinhardt-Becker 2005), and freedom.

Starting in the early 19th century, love marriage (based on the lover's free choice) competes with strategic marriage (based on economic, social, symbolic concerns) and love gradually becomes the only legitimate ground for marriage in Western societies. Partnership love semantics revolves around a rational, practical, realistic conception of love (Reinhardt-Becker 2005, 2015), not necessarily sexually exclusive, resulting in a relationship based on negotiation, problem solving and relationship work (Lenz 2005), within which individuals preserve their autonomy and personal space (Leupold 1983), and which only lasts as long as the partners consider it to be satisfying and supportive of their self-fulfillment (Giddens 1992). Romantic love semantics and partnership semantics are regarded as opposed (Leupold 1983; Reinhardt-Becker 2015), yet coexisting in contemporary representations, discourses, and practices (Boudon 2017; Duncan

2015; Gross 2005; Swidler 2001; Van Hoof 2013) and even *integrated* into a new love semantics merging traditional references with modern reflexivity (Piazzesi *et al.* 2018; Carter & Duncan 2018).

Scholarship has also highlighted how these two love semantics historically had and still have a specific gender-related impact. Women are generally regarded as more vulnerable and differently engaged within love relationships, thus investing and risking more than men in the attempt of maintaining the relationship, but also when it ends (Belleau & Lobet 2017). Since the 19th century, advice literature has identified women as responsible for intimate relationship work, for ensuring harmony and well-being in the family, and for avoiding marital conflicts (Mahlmann 1991). This tendency is confirmed by recent studies on contemporary self-help books, with the addition of a neoliberal, managerial twist (Jonas 2007), which is fostered by the therapeutic turn of the partnership semantics (Giddens 1992), and encourages women to "manage" the couple, and perform communicational and emotional work, etc. Empirical research shows persisting inequalities in the way material / domestic as well as emotional work is divided within heterosexual love relationships, with women statistically taking on the bigger share (Duncombe & Marsden 1993; Gabb & Fink 2015; Goldberg 2013). It is on this terrain that feminist scholars have criticized the persisting romantic allure of contemporary love ideals for being delusional, unrealistic or misleading, particularly for women (Jackson 1993; Evans 2003, 2004; Illouz 2012). In her analysis of relationship advice books published between 1981 and 2000 and directed to a female readership, Hazleden (2004) has found evidence of this same pessimistic, even pathologizing stance towards love.

Thus, social discourse and cultural productions appear to have integrated hints and reflections documented by these critiques and empirical findings. Analyses of the late 20th century to early 21st century TV series illustrate how the "female-centered drama" (Lotz 2006) has become a genre in serial audiovisual production, as its narratives focus on women's struggles with their love life, its challenges, pleasures, disappointments, and conciliation with professional and personal ambitions. Consistent with feminist analyses of gender imbalance in private and public life, these narratives clearly articulate love's challenges as gendered, portraying different outcomes for men and women pursuing romantic love in a late modern society. Morin observes that female characters in 1995-2005 American TV series (*Ally McBeal*, *Gilmore Girls*, etc.) experiment with a variety of

relational patterns (romantic, passionate, pure[1]), which foster different versions of the self, different self-projections (2012, p. 164). Because they "want it all", and because love is precarious and requires work, these women mobilize strategical and professional skills in their private lives in order to pursue their dream, conciliating love and career, conjugal life and personal independence. However, after 2005, TV series (*The Good Wife, Desperate Housewives, Cougar Town, Nurse Jackie, The New Adventures of Old Christine* etc.) tend to present women in their forties who have already been married or in a long-term relationship, have children *and* a career – thus have already complied with social expectations linked to the heterosexual norm (Morin 2017, p. 219). Managing private and public sphere is no longer an issue as it was in the 1995-2005 TV series, when building a couple could have easily meant giving up one's freedom and emancipation. Having been disappointed by love once (or more), these more mature women look for love outside of the nuclear family, aim at building a "pure relationship" and remain skeptical towards romance and passionate love (Morin 2017, p. 219). Thus, according to Morin, female characters in the late 2000s balance their life ambitions thanks to a more realistic vision of love (involving "the politics" of love, that is to say a conception of the political implications of love for the emancipation of women) and a "pure" relational pattern for intimate life. As a conclusion, Morin states: "The resolution of the happiness crisis lies in a little revolution: instead of seeking the absolute, find the wise (for reflexive) mix" (2012, p. 169, our translation).

In this paper, we discuss whether this still is an accurate description of women's love narratives in late 2010s TV series. Did this "little revolution" provide for a new form of happiness and balance in women's lives as they are narrated by contemporary TV series? How is love defined by these cultural productions, and how are its definitions connected to women's identities? Our discussion will focus on two entangled aspects of love narratives: love's features and love's temporality. Identifying the features attributed to love by contemporary love narratives in TV series is meant as a contribution to the above mentioned scholarly endeavor to describe contemporary Western love semantics. Regarding love's temporality, there are two main theoretical reasons compelling the discussion. Firstly, at least from the Romanticism on, love is situated within stories (Giddens

[1] The reference is to Giddens' "pure relationship" (1992), a relationship emancipated from traditional norms – especially concerning monogamy and gender inequalities –, hinged on individual autonomy, satisfaction, self-fulfillment and pleasure, resting on communication and mutual disclosure between the partners, and in which sexual pleasure is at the very core.

1992) that unfold in time through events and actions, thus making love a historical[2] phenomenon. Secondly, and as a consequence, the development of modern love narratives revolves around the constitution of a specific temporality of love (Luhmann 1982). In the 16th century, the instability of love was accounted for by referring to the finitude of beauty or to the natural deterioration of mundane things. As of the 17th century, however, instability problems start being connected to love's temporal cycle, where love's fulfillment accelerates love's deterioration. Thus, obstacles to love must be cherished, as they extend the stage of idealization and defer the end of love (Luhmann 1982, p. 89). The centrality of temporality increases the reflexive turn of love semantics: every action or communication can now be interpreted against the background of the structured unfolding of love – either retrospectively or through anticipation. The same piece of information has a different meaning at the beginning or towards the end of a love relationship: the process of love determines how information must be interpreted (Luhmann 1982, p. 117) and which expectations are appropriate. Thus, the link between love's features and love's temporality is deeply embedded in Western love semantics.

Methodology

Our data come from a 2015-2017 case study of the Quebec French TV series *La Galère* (2007-2013), which can be classified as a "female-centered drama" (Lotz 2006). Our research is anchored in a perspective inspired by scholarship on contemporary sexual and love scripts in North-American TV series (Lavigne 2009 ; Lavigne *et al*., 2013 ; Markle 2008; Piazzesi *et al.* 2018); therefore, it does not take into account reception or material production of the TV series.

La Galère's four main characters are women in their late thirties, early forties: Claude, Isabelle, Mimi and Stéphanie. The story begins when the four women, who have been friends for years, decide to move in together, with their seven children. Claude and Isabelle are still in a long-term love relationship, while Mimi and Stéphanie are single and seek – in different ways – the love of their lives. All four characters' romantic expectations have been repeatedly crushed, either by the day-to-day unfolding of routines, inequalities, frustrations, or by men's inability to commit to a long-term relationship. The six seasons (62 episodes) of the series narrate the four protagonists'

[2] In the sense of the "historicity" of emotional dispositions developed by Oksenberg Rorty (1986).

love and intimate lives. This specific focus, in addition to the high reflexivity shown by the characters, makes the series particularly suited to provide data on contemporary love semantics and its correlation with gender difference.

We have opted for a purposive sample and selected scenes presenting conversations or actions of at least one of the four women on relevant themes (love feelings, sexuality, marriage or relationship, domestic life). The sample consisted of 41 out of 62 episodes (67%). Between 4,5 and 19 minutes per episode have been coded (a total of 1230 minutes). The coding grid was built both inductively and deductively (Kim *et al.* 2007), by selecting relevant themes from available literature and by identifying semantic elements in the TV series. We also have compiled each main character's intimate biography across love relationships, sexuality, marriage, divorce, or maternity, on chronological timelines, which highlight within- and between-differences among the intimate biographies of the characters. These reconstructed biographies provide contextual elements crucial for understanding narratives of love conveyed in the TV series, and thus constitute frameworks for analyzing coded themes. Narratives include a chronology of events structured in a logical way, which allows analysts to infer causality between different elements, as well as evaluations from characters giving particular meanings to those events (Glover, 2003). As such, narratives prove to be ideal units of analysis for the purpose of highlighting certain represented features of love, like its temporality or women's reflexivity, as well as identifying shifts in the semantics of love beyond what is strictly visually or discursively represented. Narrative analysis also allows us to observe the articulation of diverse, sometimes competing, normative references and the way they make sense in a character's biographical trajectory. For the purpose of this paper, we have extracted and analyzed data regarding the main characters' views on love and the ways they are embedded in the narratives of their intimate biography. The analysis focuses on convergence and difference between conceptions of love; on love's connection to the specific challenges faced by each main character in their intimate life; and on the synergy between these two aspects in the unfolding of the narrative. We will start by summarizing the four love narratives and, for each one, highlight specific challenges in the main character's dealing with love. We will then analyze and discuss the different conceptions of love and the different conceptions of love's temporality that organize the narratives.

Data: narrating love stories

Stéphanie

Stéphanie is single, has three children with three different fathers, and she initiates the house sharing project with her three friends (Claude, Mimi and Isabelle). In fact, she strongly believes that love and passion cannot survive cohabitation and routine. She is in love with Marc, (fictional) Quebec Premier, they have some sexual encounters but, for political reasons, he does not wish to commit to a relationship. Stéphanie believes that loving each other is not enough, she wants to be Marc's official partner. After numerous deceptions caused by Marc, Stéphanie meets Romain, who is willing to engage in a serious relationship. Stéphanie hesitates. Marc, jealous, comes forward and states his willingness to be with her, but the relationship ends rapidly – again for reasons connected to Marc's political status. Devastated, Stéphanie goes back to Romain. Her feelings for him are not as strong as her love for Marc, but Romain, unlike Marc, is available. At first, she wants to keep the relationship more casual, but Romain refuses to have sex with her as long as she does not commit to their relationship. She finally accepts to do so, but they quickly find out that their plans for the future do not match: Romain wants to live with Stéphanie and have children, while she does not wish to leave the house she shares with her friends. When she becomes pregnant with Romain's child, she pleads for a "living apart together" arrangement, but Romain refuses and threatens to leave her if she does not get an abortion. She complies, but leaves him. She starts having stronger feelings for Michel, her ex-partner and father of her oldest child. Meanwhile, Marc tries to convince Stéphanie to return to him. After hesitating for a while, she accepts to marry Marc, under the condition that she will not move in with him. The day of the wedding, she has sex with Michel and confesses to Marc who immediately forgives her, having mistreated her for years. Stéphanie finds out later that she is pregnant. At the end of the TV series, she still lives with her friends and does not know who the biological father of the baby is.

Stéphanie faces specific challenges: be happy in her love life without sacrificing her dreams and desires, and also be faithful to herself without giving up her dream of finding love; learn to love in a more "orderly", traditional way, as it is expected by some men (Romain, Marc), and at the same time resist traditional prescriptions (embodied by her mother), such as marrying an older, richer man to have a comfortable life. She ends up marrying the rich breadwinner with high social

status and embracing a traditional marriage based on romantic love, but she insists on a non-traditional living arrangement (*living apart together*).

Isabelle

Isabelle is married to Jacques, a Quebec Cabinet Minister[3], and is a stay-at-home mother of two. Despite her law degree, she is the sole provider of childcare and domestic work, with no help or recognition from her husband, whom she supports in his political ambitions. She is deeply frustrated by the situation. Passion is over, sex is boring, and displays of affection are rare and shallow. When Stéphanie and the other friends make plans to move in together, she refuses to join them: she feels responsible for Jacques. When she discovers Jacques' infidelity, she changes her mind and leaves him. She resumes working as a lawyer and tries to gain autonomy and financial independence. As they start seeing each other again, Jacques finds out that he is not their son's biological father and breaks up with Isabelle. She explains that she was raped by a colleague of his, and they get back together. Isabelle agrees to return home on the condition that she will be relieved of at least 50% of the burden of domestic work, but the plan collapses when she finds out that Jacques has a lover. She serves him divorce papers and decides to run for office in his district to spite him. Later, they start dating again and still have feelings for each other. Isabelle demands the reciprocity in sexual pleasure that she never had before and, for the first time, has orgasms during sexual intercourse with Jacques. Later, she learns that she has early Alzheimer's and breaks up with Jacques, realizing that she will not be happy with him in the short time she has left. She meets Eric, a man who does not match her taste and who is very different from her, but they initiate a relationship. As a couple they are more egalitarian (including financially) and this leaves her more room for self-fulfillment, yet there is little talk of love, sex and living together. Isabelle and Eric have a good time together until he learns that she is in possession of illegal medications for her condition and takes them away from her. She breaks up with him, then they make up and he decides to go on a trip to "find himself". Isabelle does not join him and she waits for his return. At the end of the last season of the show, they have a baby and are together, but her illness is progressing and she has trouble remembering who he is.

[3] Jacques' character does not resemble any current Quebec politicians.

Isabelle faces the following specific challenges: to flourish, be autonomous and self-fulfilled within a love relationship; to balance love with equal access to resources and opportunities; to learn to take her place, make demands, and be more assertive in a relationship with a man.

Claude

As the story starts, Claude is in a long-term relationship with Antoine, they live together, are not married and have two children. The division of domestic work is extremely unfair, with Claude taking care of everything and paying all the bills while Antoine is writing his PhD dissertation. Passion and sexual desire have died, and Claude seizes what she considers to be an opportunity to revive them in her life with Antoine: she moves in with her friends, as Stéphanie has suggested. Claude and Antoine are still a couple, but she has three extramarital affairs and gives Antoine a sexually transmitted infection. As she gets in a serious fight with Mimi and needs a new place to stay, Claude confesses her infidelity and begs Antoine to allow her to move back in with him, but he leaves her. Claude starts seeing Barry, a millionaire whom she dates for his money, and then François, whom she meets while he is dating her friend Mimi. Both relationships are casual and lack in long-term perspectives, but the one with François becomes more stable as Claude fears solitude. While dismissing sexual exclusivity as a principle, Claude is overly jealous and controlling towards François. As routine starts settling in, Claude's sexual desire for François diminishes, and she breaks up the relationship. Claude and Antoine reconcile when their teenage daughter goes through a rough patch. They decide to reunite, get engaged and, after some time, get married. Meanwhile, Antoine has bought a small farmhouse in the countryside and wants the family to live there. Claude, who reluctantly moves in, hates it. Willing to leave and ready to divorce, she changes her mind when she finds out how rich Antoine has become after inheriting from his father. All along the TV series narrative, Claude's sexual desire and passionate feelings towards men appear to be fundamentally triggered by wealth, ostentatious spending, and luxury. Claude tries a number of deceptive techniques, including pretending to be pregnant, in order to deter Antoine from leaving her for their attractive neighbor. Upon finding she is not really pregnant, Antoine breaks up with Claude. Over time, they gradually find out they are still in love, and they have sex on several occasions. Claude wants to get back together, but Antoine will only date her when she becomes as rich as he is, in order for him to be sure that she is in it for love and

not for money. Claude gets pregnant with Antoine's child and is resentful. After struggling for a while, she decides to keep the baby, who is born at the end of the last season, while Claude still lives with her friends. She and Antoine have come to the conclusion that their relationship can only work outside of any institutional commitment.

Claude's challenges concern keeping passion and sexuality alive within a steady, long-term relationship; channeling desires that find neither place nor satisfaction within marriage; in order to keep her partner, adapting to living conditions that do not suit her, thus adjusting her material desires for comfort and luxury while pursuing her feelings and ambitions regarding conjugal life.

Mimi

Mimi is single and looking for the love of her life. Tired of living alone, she enthusiastically agrees to move in with her friends. In the first season of the TV series, she meets a series of men with whom she has sex on the first date, but none of them is interested in a committed relationship. Mimi is constantly disappointed. Sex is a source of great pleasure for her, and she usually acts on her desire and drives, but her enthusiastic sexuality is considered by her friends as a big obstacle to her desire for a steady, serious relationship. She falls in love with François on their first encounter, but he has sex with her friend Claude while they are still dating. Mimi then meets Julien, and this time she follows her friends' advice and puts off sex for a while. She falls in love with him and, for love, endures frustrations and even agrees to participate in his criminal activities. After a while, however, she discovers that he is leading a double life, is married and has children. While trying to get over the disappointment, Mimi meets a priest, Dominique, with whom she has sex. Mimi gets pregnant, and the pregnancy revives her hope to form a family. Living together with the father of her child, a plan that she had given up for a long time, suddenly becomes an option. Dominique, however, hesitates in making the decision to leave the Church and live with her. Finally, he decides to move in with her, but their cohabitation soon becomes unbearable for both. Just as in Claude's case, living together fatally endangers the conjugal project; but for Mimi this happens on the ground of gender inequalities in the division of domestic and relational work. Their relationship ends. Mimi meets David, a single dad who is indoctrinated by a cult, and their relationship has a short life: he practices some form of chastity, and Mimi's understanding of a love relationships entails sexual intimacy. At the end of the last season, François comes back into

Mimi's life, they start a long-distance relationship (he lives in London) and she gets pregnant, while still living with her friends. Mimi's dream of forming a family is fulfilled, although with a non-traditional arrangement.

Mimi faces several challenges in her intimate life: finding "real" love, which involves exclusive mutual commitment and family, thus combining all dimensions of an intimate relationship; learning to distance herself from her sexual drives and her desperate need for love and postponing their satisfaction; finding a balance between satisfaction of her desires and self-preservation.

Love's features

In the interwoven narratives of these four intimate trajectories, love's features appear to be grouped around three main semantic clusters, which we identify through three general statements about love that the TV series endorses throughout its six seasons:

A) *Love is tantamount to passion and dies within marriage and routine.* This conception of love comes across as the leading thesis of the whole TV series, but emerges more directly from Claude and Isabelle's story. While the four women agree on this conception of love, Stéphanie embodies an agentic, entrepreneurial variation of it: *love is in great (or better) shape when there are obstacles, hindrances, and troubles* – which one has to provide. Consequently, love demands from women two distinct attitudes: patience and endurance to withstand the difficulties of love; and entrepreneurship and work to keep it alive. When the four women talk about moving in together, they have a discussion about marriage as being the tomb of erotic love, and what can be done (e.g. live apart) to revive the passion. Sexual arousal is constantly put down by the boredom that routine brings, and efforts have to be made by women to "spice things up" within their relationships. However, looking for sexual gratification outside of the established relationship represents a punishable transgression as monogamy still constitutes the normative ideal, and a rule to abide by.

This conception of love is superficially consistent with a pre-romantic ideal (Luhmann 1982), according to which love's fulfillment coincides with its decline (de Rougemont 1954). But there is more to it: this old fatalism merges with the post-romantic, realistic assessment of the collapse

of the romantic ideal of an eternal love fostering ongoing mutual sexual interest and framed within a monogamous and life-long marriage (Kipnis 2004). Both the 1920s "objective love" semantics (Reinhardt-Becker 2005) and the 1970s-1990s partnership semantics (Leupold 1983) are considered by sociological literature as reactions to the romantic merge. The "objective love" blueprint pleads for a realistic, non-monogamous love relationship focused on pleasure and companionship, while the partnership blueprint loosens the monogamous norm and responds to the flaws of the romantic ideal by focusing on personal autonomy, problem-solving, communication, and mutual disclosure (Giddens 1992). Generally speaking, this modern paradigm is represented in cultural productions and social discourse as demanding a lot of work, rationality, and matter-of-factness, especially from women. In her comparative study of the daily construction of love in couples from Switzerland and Quebec, Henchoz (2014) also found that Quebec partners are particularly inclined to highlight and talk about the hard work that a love relationship entails, especially when it seeks equality. Surprisingly enough, though, the TV series appears to reject the solutions offered by the partnership model and to plead instead for a return to classical recipes: living apart, enticing desire through distance and scarcity, breaking intimacy and daily familiarity, as well as ongoing disclosure. Such a relationship program still entails a lot of planning, organizing, negotiating, and relationship work, which is carried out by women and upon which the male characters merely react. This conception of love, thus, is still consistent with the romantic ideology of the gendered division of relationship work: women are the more competent partners, better equipped to deal with the challenges of being in a heterosexual relationship. Advice books spanning from the 19th century (Mahlmann 1991) to the late 20th century (Jonas 2007; Scholz 2014) have promoted this idea of women as intimate entrepreneurs, an idea which appears to thrive throughout love paradigm shifts, and to correspond to broadly popular post-feminist conceptions of women's empowerment (Spar 2013; Fraser 2009).

The TV series' post-romantic realism, however, has instead a genuine feminist twist. If love dies within marriage, this is partly due to persistent inequalities in the division of work and in the price the partners have to pay to build a traditional, long-term love relationship. Thus, how could putting additional, entrepreneurial responsibilities on the shoulders of women help fixing the problem? This feminist stance connects features of love grouped under A to those grouped under B.

B) *Love is a high-risk endeavor, especially for women, who nevertheless fall for it over and over again.* Mimi and Stéphanie are the main representatives of this conception of love, but Isabelle and Claude also experience love as entailing heavy, almost unbearable consequences. For Mimi and Stéphanie, love hurts as they repeatedly fail at finding requited love and, when they find it, building a stable relationship on it. Mimi is perceived by her friends as being constantly "ripped off" by men who take advantage of her sexual availability to use her and then discard her. Similarly, Stephanie resents feeling like Marc's mistress, being good enough for him as a sexual partner, but not as a conjugal partner. Thus, even instant sexual pleasure is often later followed by frustration for being instrumentalized by men. Isabelle and Claude's love relationships are a source of frustration, disappointment, and lack of recognition. When they decide to move out of their homes, they still love their husbands, but can no longer bear the inequalities, indifference, and disengagement.

This idea of love is consistent with pre-romantic and romantic semantics of love as an overwhelming, dangerous force, which could cause the lovers (and especially women) to lose control of themselves (Luhmann 1982) and endanger their integrity. According to Hazleden, such a gender specific pessimism is still reflected by recent advice books (2004). As noted above, feminist critique of the romantic love ideal also raises the question of the "cost" of love for women in terms of independence, autonomy, personal projects, and dignity (Jackson 1993; Evans 2003). However, the classic romantic solution entailing the active conversion of passionate love into conjugal love, as championed by Rousseau (Pulcini 1998), is no longer an appropriate solution: if classic romantic narratives ended either happily, with a marriage, or unhappily, with separation or death (Kaufmann 2007), contemporary, female-centered narratives focus on what happens to relationships and women *after* getting married or settling down. In other words, they focus on the cost and the consequences of conjugal love, as the end product of romantic involvement. Even more remarkably, the partnership ideal, the pure relationship (Giddens 1992), and the "objective love" (Reinhardt-Becker 2005) semantics do not appear as viable solutions either. This finding contradicts Morin's observation of a reconciliation of personal and intimate ambitions for women in their forties in US contemporary TV series (Morin 2017, 2012). The four protagonists of *La Galère* still seek the thrill of romantic, passionate love, which appears to be the feeling and the experience that make the whole endeavor worthwhile. If they are not actively looking for the thrill (like Mimi and Stéphanie are), they are nevertheless exposed to the possibility of *falling* in love

and suffering for it: even though Claude pretends to be immune to love and the pain it entails, in fact she is not. This takes us to love features grouped under C. Before discussing this last semantic cluster, it is worth noting that the highlighted difference between love semantics observed by Morin in USA TV series and love semantics in *La Galère* also entails different narrative strategies. American TV series analyzed by Morin mostly present romantic love as "a thing of the past" through flashbacks – as if "revoking" its right to be part of the present narrative (Morin 2014a, p. 450). *La Galère*, on the contrary, repeatedly incorporates romantic love within the present narrative of each of the four main characters' personal life.

C) *Love is worth fighting for, until it is the perfect love*.

Love still is idealized as an exciting, worthwhile experience, as a source of happiness and gratification – as the greatest pleasure in human life. The four characters in *La Galère* want their love relationships to match the idealized pattern of romantic convergence of passionate love, marriage (or stabilized relationship) and ongoing sexual gratification. Feelings of love heighten women's sexual experiences, and vice-versa. They clearly have a standard in mind, which they employ to assess present and prospective love relationships. Consequently, they work hard to match reality and ideal – availing themselves as much of stratagems as of communication and therapeutic tools. At the same time, as we have discussed above, the four women reflect on the cost that such an idealized love entails for them and for their ambitions. Hope and idealization coexist with more detached attitudes spanning from realism to skepticism and even pessimism. Thus, there is no contradiction between features in semantic cluster B and features in semantic cluster C, rather a tension stemming from the persistence of traditional values and the parallel development of a (feminist) social reflexivity recommending caution and awareness to women. Furthermore, this tension is at the very core of female-centered TV series narratives, which call attention on the process leading female protagonists to wise up with regard to the implications of traditional love ideals (Morin 2017). As it happens in *Sex and the City*, *Gilmore Girls, Girls* and other female-centered dramas, *La Galère* showcases the increasing complexity of women's reflexivity, which is additionally fostered by sharing and mutual support within the close circle of friends. Thus, in contemporary TV series, female friendship appears to be a main component of women's learning about intimacy, relationships, and men.

A further implication of love features in this cluster is the idea that there can be *only one right* partner, namely the man one passionately loves – an attitude that is specifically embodied by Stéphanie. To her, there can be no second best: only Marc is worth being with, because he is her one true love. On the other hand, since the coveted relationship does not take off, Stéphanie has intimate relationships with other men – and so does Claude. Although monogamy seems to prevail at the end of the sixth and final season, loving someone does not imply sexual and intimate exclusivity – as it would have according to the romantic ideal. Thus, traditional romantic expectations coexist with a realistic, pragmatic attitude and with women's affirmation of their sexuality.

Love's temporality

The temporality of love emerging from the TV series' love narratives appears to match classic, stereotypical features of love. As the 16th-18th century traditional passionate love semantics posits (Luhmann 1982), love has a universal, almost inescapable, timely structure which goes from desire to fulfillment, and from fulfillment to end. This classic conception is superficially reflected by love features in A and B: women have a pessimistic attitude towards love's unfolding over time – they anticipate chagrin and frustration as a necessary outcome of falling in love. At the same time, there is hope that work and action can extend love's natural life through different strategies (delay, scarcity, obstacles, ambiguity, etc.).

A closer look, however, reveals a late modern complexification of this classic fatalistic stance. A more recent, genuinely romantic vision of love's unfolding in time entails a temporal split between two stages of love (Jackson 1993; Pulcini 1998): the first stage is love as overwhelming passion and self-loss, marking the beginning of an amorous relationship; the second stage is one in which the initial "folly" turns into a mature, wiser form of love, capable of stabilization and grounding authentic, durable intimacy (thus, marriage). Romantic inscription of love within marriage, i.e. within a stability-oriented relationship, encourages this new interpretation of the ephemeral character of passionate love, and de-dramatizes its instability by circumscribing it to a limited phase of the lovers' interaction. The second, longer stage of a steadier mutual sentimental disposition allows for stabilized expectations and long-term planning. As Pulcini (1998) has shown, Rousseau's novel *La Nouvelle Héloïse* already pleaded for the cultivation of conjugal love

as the only form of love in which one can preserve oneself, whereas passionate love implies self-loss and self-destruction. The late modern, therapeutically twisted version of this semantics stresses the mature stage as “healthy” and regards the first stage as “pathological”. As Giddens’ work on the transformations of intimacy shows (1992), the therapeutic language is far from being metaphorical: as the focus of personal “investments” gradually shifts from “love” back to the self, love relationships are increasingly expected to provide support and a safe space for self-fulfillment. In addition, self-fulfillment is an endeavor which involves multiple areas of individual life (work, friendships, hobbies, etc.). “Good” love is love that is steady, balanced, wise, solid, and does not threaten personal stability and personal networks.

Passion, though, is not relinquished in contemporary love narratives. As the love stories in *La Galère* highlight, the fundamental moment of passion and mutual desire is idealized by the main characters, who attempt to preserve its overwhelming power or to cyclically reactivate it in order to revive the “thrill”. Love’s temporality in the TV series, thus, is linear as well as circular. Furthermore, the protagonists of *La Galère* reject the linear unfolding of love relationships in an additional way: by choosing a “living apart together” arrangement, they produce cyclical interruption of the linear path of ongoing self-disclosure, intimacy and routine. Where cohabitation ensures continuity and stabilization over time, non-cohabitation ensures tolerability as well as increased equality. Not only are love relationships no longer expected to provide stable support in everyday life (a function now performed by relationships of friendship and solidarity among women): their daily unfolding is regarded as intolerable, as it kills passion and desire and as it wears women out through asymmetrical commitment and workload. Thus, the link between love’s temporal unfolding and committed work on the intimate bond is shifted: relationship work no longer aims at ensuring steadiness and durability through uninterrupted dedication, rather it is aimed at *enduring the bond* by reactivating passionate mutual interest, sabotaging routinization, and defusing power inequalities.

Conclusion

We have analyzed and discussed contemporary love ideals developed by cultural productions, more specifically by a Quebec female-centered TV series. We looked at features of love, at their continuity and change with regard to traditional semantics, and at their inscription into love’s

temporal structure. With respect to the TV series *La Galère,* our findings illustrate how different, potentially contradictory conceptions of love are integrated and combined in the same narratives, as the characters draw on multiple sources of meaning and on multiple norms to face complex challenges. These challenges are connected to women's new positions in Western societies, to the new identities that they attempt to embody and realize, as well as to social reflexivity surrounding old and new structural inequalities. In this respect, feminist demands and awareness play a major role in these transformations, as women bear conflicting ambitions, expectations, and injunctions coming from society at large (Carter & Duncan 2018). Thus, the main characters of *La Galère* avail themselves of a combination of traditional and non-traditional references to make sense of love, of its unfolding over time, and of what a woman can do to ensure her happiness and the success of a long-term intimate commitment. Traditional references are used by the protagonists of *La Galère* to maximize pleasure, elicit intimacy and emotional closeness. They are also used to minimize uncertainty, to maintain hope in times of disillusionment, and to bestow "order" on their lives and intimate networks – also through recourse to old-fashioned gender role attributions. Non-traditional mindframes, references, and meanings are applied to decision-making when there is an unaffordable risk of self-loss, but also to make room for the traditional kind of passionate erotic love that the four women are looking for. Such an integration (Piazzesi *et al*. 2018) of conflicting love semantics provides a narrative framework that is clearly incompatible with Morin's analysis of women's intimate 'careers' and strategies in recent USA TV series (2017, 2012). Our observations concur with Morin's, but only up to a point. Romantic, passionate love certainly is demystified, rationalized, mocked, fatally shaken by the denunciation of the unfairness of the patriarchal order (Morin 2017, p. 265). However, passionate love still embodies the coveted ideal; it still attracts as an endeavor worth fighting for and investing in; and it still conveys the hope of happiness. Further, according to Morin, women in contemporary TV series protect themselves against self-loss entailed by passionate love, and such stance is deeply embedded in the feminist awareness of gender inequalities and injustices connected to heterosexual love's unfolding (Morin 2017, p. 239). Yet our data shows that those women do not entirely relinquish traditional gendered roles, in which they find reassurance of their competence as women as well as handy shortcuts to get what they want from men (sex, affection, presence, material advantages – see Lavoie Mongrain and Piazzesi 2018). Finally, Morin states that women in contemporary TV series tend to disconnect love and sexuality, and link sexuality to pleasure without commitment (Morin 2017, p. 266).

However, according to our data, monogamy still is the general norm, commitment still rhymes with fidelity, and extramarital sex is stigmatized as moral failure, that must be concealed from the official partner (Piazzesi *et al*. 2018). The female characters in *La Galère* have not made peace with the failure of traditional patterns and roles. More specifically, they are clearly unwilling to give up the romantic love ideal, despite its obvious flaws and its rather unbearable consequences, as well as the kind of "world" that goes with it. If these women experiment with "thinner" relationships (e.g. excluding cohabitation), such relationships are certainly not traditionally romantic, but they are not "pure" (as meant by Giddens, 1992) either. Rather, they combine advantages from both romantic and partnership semantics, while attempting to mitigate the risks and the negative consequences of both through mutual compensation.

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Repronormativity and its Others: Queering Parental Love in Times of Culturally Compulsory Reproduction

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Abstract: We may have believed women's (sexual) agency was an established right in Southern Europe. However, the recent history of assisted reproductive technologies (ART) in Portugal provides an enlightening example of how sexuality and reproduction have remained bounded. Until 2016, women in Portugal could not access ART unless they were formally partnered with a man (married or in a different-sex de facto union).[1] In this paper, I start by exploring the cultural context in which the motherhood regime, understood as both reproduction and parenting, is embedded in Portugal. The motherhood regime puts forward strong expectations about becoming a parent, hence feeding the cultural imaginary that makes reproduction compulsory (Roseneil et al. 2016). Having repronormativity as its backdrop, this section of the paper is in silent dialogue with the legal framework that removed most obstacles to same-sex parenting in Portugal in December 2016. In the second section, I consider biographic narrative interviews conducted with lesbian and bisexual mothers in Lisbon between April and July 2016, with a particular focus on participants' encounters with dominant ideologies of motherhood and cultural expectations around parental love. Participants in the study often reported situations demonstrating that love was the only emotion that made it culturally acceptable for women to engage in same-sex partnering and parenting. I will advance a reading of queer that can be used in future reproductive studies. I will suggest that in Southern Europe, where reproduction and parenting have been historically constrained by strict rules around gender and sexuality (Moreira, 2018, Santos 2013, Trujillo 2016), failing to be a particular kind of (heteronormative, cisnormative, mononormative) mother may offer a fruitful way for queering parental love through embracing reproductive misfits.

Keywords: reproduction, repronormativity, lesbian and bisexual, Portugal, intimate.

[1] The law changed in 2016 to its current formulation: "Those who can use ART are different-sex couples or couples of women, married or cohabiting, as well as any woman regardless of their marital status and sexual orientation." (article 6, law n. 17/2016, 20 June).

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Introduction

In the aftermath of the sexual revolution of the 1960s, sexuality and reproduction seemed to be, finally, two separate categories. The democratized access to contraceptives, especially the pill, together with the right to safe abortions, granted women the power to choose when and if they would become mothers, regardless of sexual practice. Partnering and parenting were no longer necessarily co-dependent. However, when the topic is same-sex parenting, the link between sexuality and reproduction seems magnified, retaining much cultural significance. The recent history of medically assisted reproduction in Portugal offers a striking example of how sexuality and reproduction remain bounded in Southern Europe. Furthermore, this bond is culturally encouraged through a gendered narrative of love as a moral duty: women are expected to love their partner/s; and women are expected to love their prospective children.

Drawing on original empirical material gathered in 2016 within the INTIMATE Research Project, in this paper I challenge the assumption that sexuality and reproduction are culturally disentangled, suggesting that love remains a moral duty stitching together women's practices of partnering and parenting. This assumption is challenged based on two apparently conflictive grounds. On the one hand, in Southern European countries sexuality has been considered an impeding factor in law for accessing reproductive and parenting rights for LGBTQ people, whose love relationships were often dismissed, silenced or prohibited. On the other hand, lesbian and bisexual mothers often report that pregnancy marked the moment when they decided to come out to relatives and other important people who managed to overcome former homophobia through the vision of the prospective loving mother-child bond. Together these two factors expose the contradictions of a legal framework which until 2016 deprived subjects of reproductive agency[2] based on sexuality, while at the same time the very same subjects felt culturally validated when they would join the reproductive ladder. Therefore, legitimacy to access parenting is both questioned and reinforced by sexuality and love, even if in contradictory ways.

[2] By reproductive agency I mean self-determination and the freedom to make informed choices regarding reproduction and parenting without constraints stemming from prejudice. These choices include the right to access reproduction-related services regardless of sexual or relational orientation.

1. The motherhood regime and its ideologies

Southern European countries are described in the literature on welfare and gender regimes as epitomes of family-oriented, procreative and (hetero)normative states (Mínguez and Crespi 2017, Torres, Mendes and Lapa 2008, Flaquer 2000, Santos 2012). Even though evidence suggests significant changes in recent years, most specifically regarding legal transformation from the 2000s onwards, cultural expectations encourage linearity in intimate biographies: after reaching adulthood, one finds a partner, gets formal recognition (i.e. by marriage) and has (one's own biological) children. In previous work, together with colleagues Roseneil, Crowhurst and Stoilova, we referred to this as *the procreative norm,* to signal the powerful "assumption, expectation and cultural demand that biological procreation should occupy the center-ground of the social formation, that intimate relationships, sexuality and the wider organization of the social should be driven by, and structured around, a naturalized notion of a primary, fundamental procreative imperative" (Roseneil et al. 2016: 3).

The push for parenting is culturally stronger in relation to women who, according to religious and often political authorities, are expected to take responsibility for renewing the population, in order to prevent a shortage of labor force in the future. As recently as June 2016, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan urged women to have at least three children, and said that a woman's life was "incomplete" if she failed to reproduce. Speaking at the opening of the new building of the Turkey's Women's and Democracy Association (KADEM), Erdoğan said that "Rejecting motherhood means giving up on humanity", further adding that "A woman who says 'because I am working I will not be a mother' is actually denying her femininity". He then concluded that "A woman who rejects motherhood, who refrains from being around the house, however successful her working life is, is deficient, is incomplete".[3]

Despite meeting fierce criticism, these statements feed on a historical legacy rooted both in religion and in neoliberalism, with different narratives and agents, but similar outcomes. Motherhood is central in the gendered scripts attached to women. Willing and loving motherhood – instead of autonomous, self-determined pleasure – is the ultimate goal of women's sexuality, its excuse, what makes it acceptable. Therefore, by becoming a mother, lesbian or bisexual women

[3] Agence France-Presse, "Turkish president says childless women are 'deficient, incomplete'". *The Guardian*, june 6, 2016, www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/06/turkish-president-erdogan-childless-women-deficient-incomplete.

are – allegedly – joining (or being culturally perceived as joining) the universe of normativities they had once – allegedly – rejected, when they diverged from the heteronormative script.[4]

Therefore, what I call *the motherhood regime* of any given country consists of a set of cultural expectations, anchored in tradition, and translated into legal, political and social practices.[5] According to the dominant motherhood regime in Portugal, women are primarily and above all mothers. Current or forthcoming, but certainly caring, skillful, willing, resourceful, delighted super moms.[6]

In the early 2000s, the exploration of relational diversity, including non-monogamies, singledom and solo-living, opened the door to the questioning of the reproductive script and what it entails, especially for women. It then became apparent that a crucial aspect of the motherhood regime was the procreative norm (Roseneil et al. 2016) and, within it, repronormativity. Repronormativity, a term coined by Katherine Franke (2001) and Lee Edelman (2004), is an ideological force that narrows down the reproductive and parental human potential by reducing it to its dominant and hegemonic version. Anna Weissman suggests that repronormativity is "a paradigm that is limited to legitimized, state-sanctioned heteronormative acts of reproduction specifically through the patriarchal heteronormative family, and service to this reproduction of the heteropatriarchal nation-state" (2016: 3).

In the INTIMATE project, our understanding of repronormativity is anchored on heteronormative expectations around intimate love, reproduction and parenting. This aspect is particularly important in the Southern European context, in which same-sex parenthood has traditionally met more resistance and backlash than the recognition of same-sex marriage or other forms of partnering. And indeed, in 2009, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) demonstrated that despite considerable differences across the European Member States, "the most negative results surface when asked if homosexuals should be allowed to adopt children" (FRA 2009: 35). Cross-national surveys reveal that supporting same-sex partnering — either

[4] For an engaging and important discussion about reproduction and normativities regarding lesbian and queer motherhood in the Swedish context, see Dahl 2017 and 2018.
[5] An interesting example of how law and social policy are constitutive of the motherhood regime is the focus on work-life balance, embodied to a large extent by state feminism and gathering a substantial part of the scholarly feminist work in Portugal in the 1990s (Monteiro and Portugal 2013).
[6] For a discussion of mothers' negative feelings towards motherhood and their impact in the context of online social platforms in Portugal, see César et al 2018.

marriage or other forms of legal recognition — does not necessarily equate with support to same-sex parental rights.

However, whilst we are willing to acknowledge that heteronormative cultural norms and expectations play a significant role in the intimate biographies we construct, we somehow lack the same type of robust theoretical resources to explore repronormativity along similar lines. To put it differently, the inevitability of (heteronormative) reproduction has not received the same kind of scholarly and political attention as compulsory heterosexuality.

In 2001, Katherine Franke suggested that we "reconceptualize procreation as a cultural preference rather than a biological imperative, and then explore ways in which to lessen or at least modify the demand to conform to that preference" (2001: 185). She further argues that "repronormativity remains in the closet even while heteronormativity has stepped more into the light of the theoretical and political day. Reproduction has been so taken for granted that only women who are not parents are regarded as having made a choice—a choice that is constructed as nontraditional, nonconventional, and for some, non-natural." (2001: 186).

To reiterate, the normalcy of the reproductive status for cisgender women is overwhelming and it occupies, unchallenged, legal, political and cultural spaces. In countries with a strong familistic tradition, of which Portugal is an example, the ideologies around motherhood are powerful and highly gendered. But reality is telling us a more nuanced story. 30,3 – this is the average age at which women in Portugal become mothers (Pordata 2016). Official statistical data from 2013 reveals that 35% of all women aged between 18 and 49 did not have biological children (INE, 2013). If we consider women aged between 30 and 49, we see that nearly 13% of women (12,7%) did not have biological children. This challenges gendered expectations around women's self-fulfillment and parenting, as well as the 'natural' link between women and motherhood, opening the space for reappraising the cultural features of procreation, as suggested by Franke in 2001.

2. Mums strike back! Voices of lesbian and bisexual mothers in Lisbon

Between April and July 2016 we conducted 30 in-depth interviews with self-identified LGBTQ people living in Portugal, Spain and Italy at the time. Using the Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) (Wengraf and Chamberlayne, 2006), the focus of the interviews was their reproductive and parenting experiences. This section draws heavily on the narratives and

practices of self-identified lesbian and bisexual women, aged between 35 and 45, living in Lisbon at the time. All participants had a university degree, were partnered and parenting had been a couple-based decision.[7]

Some themes emerged from the narrative interviews as particularly significant. These were a) age and gendered ageism; b) reproductive materialities (including the material impact of reproduction and parenting); and c) reproductive misfits. These themes will be considered within the wider framework of the dominant ideologies of motherhood.

2.1. Overaged for the job? Age, gendered ageism and temporal linearity

In October 2016, Lina Alvarez, a Spanish medical doctor, gave birth to her third child. This event would not have hit the headlines of newspapers if not for the dominant reproductive regime and its ideology around good mothering. Lina Alvarez was then 62 years old. Reactions, both to her and to the doctor who conducted the treatment, were fierce. These reactions emerged from both the medical community and the wider public, who accused Lina of being selfish, irresponsible and unable to nurture her children until they reach adulthood.[8]

Ageism in relation to parenting offers a productive analytical ground to discuss the limits of parental love as a strong cultural script. Often concerns in terms of age become internalized, acting as starters or blockers of reproduction and parenting. Lesbian and bisexual mothers we interviewed displayed strong concerns with age, and these acquired different formats. First, the age of the prospective gestational and/or genetic parent plays a significant role in the decision-making process. This is often referred to as something banal, self-evident, internalized as natural:

> *Soon I would no longer be in the right age to… […] I am* ***in a hurry****! (Joana, 45-49yrs)*
> *Suddenly I was already 36 and I figured I* ***couldn't wait anymore****. I spoke to Isabel [her partner] and told her "Look, I don't think I can wait any longer!" (Alice, 40-44yrs)*
> *We were getting older and it was a bit like* ***'it's now or never'****. […] It was not a very romantic process, I guess it was more for the very pragmatic issue of knowing* ***we are almost reaching expiry***

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[7] Even though fieldwork coincided with the time ART Law was discussed and changed in Parliament, all of our participants reported experiences which were prior to the legal change.

[8] There are striking similarities between the aftermath of Lina's case and that of Adriana Iliescu in Romania in 2005: both women have faced an almost identical backlash. For more details on Lina's story, please refer to *ZAP*, "Médica espanhola foi mãe aos 62 anos de idade", October 22, 2016, zap.aeiou.pt/medica-espanhola-mae-aos-62-anos-idade-135022. For a discussion of the Adriana Iliescu's case, see Cutaș 2007.

***date** because even the clinics would not inseminate someone who is over 44 years old… (Amelia, 40-44yrs)*
I guess age was a crucial element, either we would have a child then, or we would never have a child (Catarina, 35-39yrs).

Some of these concerns stem from the perceived relation between age and success rates regarding pregnancy. But reflections about one's age are also sometimes accompanied by evaluations on good or bad parenting. And according to the repronormative script, a good mother should not be too old:

*I felt that, at 36, I couldn't wait much more coz… I mean, not only for the physical process but also coz… I mean, I **want to have a child, not a grandchild, right**? I don't want to have a child being 70 and him being 20. I wanted to have some quality of life with him still. (Alice, 40-44Yrs)*

Other questions emerging from the interviews were related to who was perceived by the couple as being fit to become a mother, who presented the highest chances of being successfully pregnant at first attempt and what was the age limit to access assisted reproduction techniques (ART) according to formal or tacit rules:

Even the clinics would not inseminate someone who is over 44 years old… […] They could not guarantee anything, as we were both over 30, they said the chances of having good enough eggs was very low, so why didn't we decide for someone else's eggs instead? And we replied, 'well, in that case we might as well adopt!', because the idea was to have our own child! (Amelia, 40-44yrs)

There are several interesting layers in this excerpt. These include displays of what can partially be interpreted as institutional ageism and, in relation to prospective mothers themselves, the reproductive hierarchy that withholds biological kinship as more important than social ties (e.g. adoption).

Moving from an individually-based evaluation, to a couple-oriented decision, the duration and quality of the relationship seemed to be crucial aspects when deciding to become a parent through ART.

We've been together for nearly 10 years now. We got married 4 years ago. When Daniel was born, yeah, we got married. The parenting project… I've always wanted to be a mum. I wasn't

sure how, it depended on finding the right person, and when Isabel and I got together, the possibility of becoming mothers started to emerge. (Alice, 40-44yrs)

I am with a woman for almost 9 years, it seemed natural that we would try to constitute a family and so we started evaluating different possibilities last year. (Catarina, 35-39yrs)
We were living together for some years… cohabiting was already a.., hum, there was a symbiosis… It was like a dance, right? (Catarina, 35-39yrs)

This connection between partnering and parenting highlights the structured character of coupledom, with a tendency to replicate linear times of intimacy ("we were together already for X years, it seemed the right time…"; "it was the next logical step").

2.2. Reproductive materialities

The material aspects of reproduction were very central in the narratives produced by the participants. Most of the time, reference to materiality stemmed from concerns with costs associated with the reproductive displacement and the health procedures involved. At other times, interviewees identified certain moments as turning points in the process of becoming mothers:

> *We started to be mothers when we first spoke about him. I told my partner: "There's a room missing" [in the house they were considering renting at the time]. There was a room missing. And I asked myself, "But why would I want another room? Ah, I want a child! I soooo want a child!" That's why I tell you that my son started there. This son, who was never born, started when I first saw that house, the house I never rented because it lacked one room for him. (Joana, 45-49Yrs)*

For several women, the parental project acquires a new materiality / becomes more real through the contact with the health unit, namely with the request for price quotes for treatment:

> *She sent them (the clinic) and email, asking for a quotation. There is this awkward thing, right, there is this awkward thing for people who are trying to get pregnant, but, yes, there are budgets. (Alice, 40-44Yrs)*

For others, the insemination and the sonogram represented the moment in which the child had become real, and hence are described as the key starting moment of parental loving:

> *I did the sonogram and to me that was the moment. When I say my child inside my womb, I believed in it, I cried, I stopped smoking on that day. And that was when I became a mother, that day in hospital! (Joana, 45-49Yrs)*

> *We still keep the sonogram, we want to put it in a frame on the wall, because that was really the beginning!' (Amelia, 40-44yrs)*

And in other cases, the birth becomes the moment of reproductive and/or parental materialization:

> *The nurse turned to me and said 'Take your child', and I was sort of surprised staring at her, 'My child?' It was the first time anyone was calling her my child. (Catarina, 35-39yrs)*

Such reproductive materialization can also be found in the symbolic objects mentioned during the interviews as powerful tokens of motherhood. These objects varied widely, from scans and baby clothes to pregnancy tests kept as powerful reminders of achievement.

Another related topic emerging in the interviews was the emotional impact of reproduction on partnering, namely on the couple relationship. Impact on coupledom was enhanced by the strict reproductive (medicalized) procedures, pressures around the 'right time' and the considerable financial strain.

2.3. Reproductive misfits join the reproductive ladder

Despite speaking from the position of intended parents, the feeling of inadequacy or perplexity when faced with parental roles and expectations emerged at times. For the purposes of this paper, I borrow the notion of misfit, originally coined by Garland-Thomson (2011) in the context of feminist disability theory. It describes someone who does not seem to belong to a group or is not accepted by a group, because of being different in some way. Interviewees referred to moments in which they felt – or were out in the position of feeling – as reproductive misfits.

Such feelings were sometimes connected to the resilience of biology, namely blood ties, that authorized relatives, friends, co-workers or neighbors to act according to a tacit hierarchy according to which the gestational mother (and her parents) was the *real* mother (and grandparents) – regardless of whether she was also the genetic mother. Other times, the misfit seemed to be caused or aggravated by the absence of adequate conceptual tools which could better describe the non-gestational mother or the grand-parents:

Our families […] obviously struggle in calling me mother. And even me, I understand that mother is the one who gives birth, but there is no alternative name for me, therefore it is difficult to explain to them… What other name is there for me, since I am a woman? It would be interesting if there was another name, but there isn't. And so we are two mothers. […] We attended childbirth classes and it was hard for me because […] the instructor kept repeating the dad, the dad, the dad. […] There was one occasion in which he asked the dads to leave the room and only the mums could stay. It was so weird, having to leave the room with all of those men who completely ignored me. At first I wasn't too sure whether I should leave the room, and when I did I felt awkward. I think it was one of the few times in which I felt awkward as a parent. (Catarina, 35-39yrs)

On other occasions, participants described situations in which they were caught at the heart of the repronormative paradigm and how that surprised them. Joana reports the time in which for the first time she met a lesbian couple who had a child. Later on in the interview Joana returns to that event and explains a bit further her amazement whilst observing the pictures displayed in the house:

And I remember staring at the picture frames and seeing two women only, and the baby, right?!? And I looked like someone who's searching for a man. I was indeed looking for a man. […] And I realized I was looking at the house, browsing, searching for something I was missing. (Joana, 45-49yrs)

On other narratives, the feeling of misfit is linked to disclosure of origins to children:

And so it worries me, in a few years from now, when he asks 'who's my dad? How did I come to be?' (Amelia, 40-44yrs)

Finally, there were also reports that link the idea of reproductive misfits to sexual orientation, most specifically to how having a lesbian relationship was considered an impeding factor for mothering:

The idea of having a kid never crossed our mind. Even if we would both like it, enjoyed the idea, but we never really thought about it because at the time it was unthinkable. (Amelia, 40-44yrs)

We both wanted to be mums, we always did… we realized it was going to be difficult, as we were both women […] There was this boy who fancied her and, in a very rational way, she started seeing him more often and I could see why and there was this weird time in which we

went a bit astray because the desire to become a mother was stronger and we thought she could have someone else's child and then we would get back together and raise that child together. (Catarina, 35-39yrs)

[referring to her partner whose job is highly male oriented] To have all of those men surrounding her and then to have to justify the existence of a child when none of them ever saw her dating anyone, ever, nothing… It would have been very difficult to manage all of that information. (Amelia, 40-44yrs)

In dominant heteronormative contexts, the decision to become a parent when you self-identify as a lesbian or bisexual is already a queer act of defiance, as Moreira (2018) aptly demonstrates regarding the Spanish context. These themes offer an important opportunity to discuss the cultural entanglements between sexuality and reproduction, one of the assumptions that this paper takes issue with.

3. Queer in Reproductive Studies, or the queer art of failed mothering

In the 2016 Hollywood blockbuster Bad Moms, Amy – a 32-year-old, recently divorced and exhausted mother of two – decides she has had enough and starts a revolution. Backed up by Carla, a seductive single mum, and Kiki, a shy woman with 4 children and who describes herself as not having any friends –, Amy runs for Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) President against impeccable, rich and never late Gwendolyn, someone who is depicted as a perfect mother, and who had been re-elected PTA president in the past 6 years. In her final statement just before election, Amy makes a decisive speech:

The truth is, when it comes to being a mum, I have no clue as to what I'm doing. And you know what, I don't think anyone does. I think we're all bad moms, and you know why? Because being a mum today is i-m-p-o-s-s-i-b-l-e. [crowd cheers in support] So can we all please stop pretending like we have it figured out, and stop judging each other for once.

The crowd is surprisingly supportive. And one by one, other mothers attending the meeting stand up and confess things they did or did not do and that could be considered as bad mothering according to dominant standards, from junk food to excessive TV-time. Two of those bad-mother-ish statements stand out as particularly challenging and unexpected in the line of testimonials, and these are the ones chosen to end the series. One mother says "I like my nanny better than I like my

husband", to her husband's dismay, sitting beside her ("No, really??"), and the women burst in applause. Another woman stands up and declares that "I don't even have kids, I just come to PTA meetings 'cause I'm lonely", followed by shy and embarrassed applause. Amy wins the election for PTA President against Gwendolyn. And her motto throughout the campaign was mothers' (and children's) right to do less – fewer meetings, less homework, fewer hours. The ability to make mistakes, to get it wrong, to not having it all figured out.

In a ten-hour flight between Madrid and Bogotá in November, Avianca Airlines advertised the movie as a comedy: "When three overworked and under-appreciated moms are pushed beyond their limits, they ditch their conventional responsibilities for a jolt of long overdue freedom, fun, and comedic self-indulgence". Arguably, this simplistic description misrepresents what could be seen as a queer feminist aim of the movie, dismissing women's rightful critique of repronormativity as a mere jolt of fun and comedic self-indulgence. Fun and indulgence is not what serious, committed mothers do; ditching your responsibilities for a bit of fun and indulgence is for spoiled, selfish and reckless adults; or kids. But the movie is more than its poor description. The scene of an admittedly imperfect mother running against the woman who epitomizes all the normativities attached to good motherhood is striking on many levels. For the purposes of this paper, I want to use this scene to prompt our thoughts around the queer art of failed mothering.

In a context in which reproduction and parenting are constrained by a set of rules around gender and sexuality, challenging the grounds through which one reproduces and/or parents on a daily basis can be interpreted as a queer stance. As such, failing to be a mother or failing to be a particular kind of (heteronormative, cisnormative, mononormative) mother, is as queer as failing to fulfil other dominant expectations.

If we return to Amy, her supporters and the two final statements during the election night –the lesbian mother and the lonely 'fake' mother –, we see how the many levels of queer intersect through the failure of parenting. In that scene we have a recently divorced mother, a single mother, a lesbian or bisexual mother, a lonely woman who attends parents meetings, women with precarious jobs, women who have uncommitted sex and women who put an end to unfulfilling relationships, women who are in the process of becoming, of traveling away from the fixed position normative motherhood had ascribed to them. These women capture the queer that stems from not having it all figured out. Or from being reproductive dissidents, or misfits.

> *We must strive, in the face of the here and now's totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a then and there. Some will say that all we have are the pleasures of this moment, but we must never settle for that minimal transport; we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds. Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing. [...] the quotidian can contain a map of the utopia that is queerness* (Muñoz 2009).

The daily encounters with ideologies of motherhood that many of our interviewees shared with us contain maps of the "utopia that is queerness". Indeed, queer teaches us to value experience. And in so doing queer creates the space for rejecting ageism and temporal linearity, reframing the material aspects of parenting, and for embracing reproductive misfits which may include single parents, surrogates, trans-parents, multi-parents and ART mothers.

Conclusion

In a context of limited visibility of LGBTQ parenting in relation to heteronormative parental roles, the focus of this article was placed on the experiences of motherhood by lesbian and bisexual women in Southern Europe. Particular attention was given to biographic accounts and experiences of the everyday (Hicks 2011), and how parenting is shaped by norms and expectations around age, material constraints and ideas around good (and bad) mothering. On the one hand, the stories we gathered demonstrate that however dissident lesbian and bisexual reproductive practices may be – and may be represented as – in Southern European countries, repronormativity is also a significant part of the doings of pregnancy, bonding and parental love. On the other hand, our biographical accounts also show how lesbian and bisexual mothers are occupying a space which is already disrupting the procreative norm (Roseneil et al 2016) and queering parenting in times of compulsory reproduction, hence engaging with theories and politics around critical kinship (Krolekke et al eds, 2016).

One important conclusion to be extracted is that reproduction and parenting are taken very seriously by lesbian and bisexual women who start their reproductive journey through ART. The decision to become a parent is thoughtful and discussed thoroughly, often for years before being enacted. They do not become parents by accident. The intended character of reproduction influences the narratives we gathered.

With us it needs to be very well planned, right? It is not as it is with a heterosexual couple for whom it just happens, right? Not with us. (Alice, 40-44yrs)

We are fortunate because we do know the exact day in which our child was conceived! (Amelia, 40-44yrs)

Some participants reported moments in which their reproductive happiness became a tool for visibility and alliance, eliciting empathy from health professionals (e.g. one interviewee described nurses volunteering to take pictures of the couple together with the baby), relatives, friends (e.g. volunteering to become donors) and extended networks of care. Therefore, legitimacy to access parenting was both questioned and reinforced by sexuality, as the stories gathered demonstrated.

The official story of reproduction as a natural drive is deeply ableist, racialized, ageist and heterosexist. Within what we called *the motherhood regime* of a given country, to become a mother one must comply with a set of tacit – when not explicit – rules (Roseneil et al. 2016). Mothers are expected to belong to a particular type of category: not too old, not too young; not too reproductive, not too sexually active; not too sick, not too poor, not too jobless[9] (McClain 1996). Mothers are expected to be cisgendered women, monogamous, fertile and able-bodied. Mothers are expected to be happily married to their cohabiting male partner. The heterosexist character of "natural reproduction" dismissed the reproductive demands of an army of potential parents such as single people, transgender or gay men, lesbian and bisexual women, polyamorous and other relationally diverse families.

Under the constraining repronormative lens, lesbians, bisexuals and other sexual dissidents continue to have an identity understood as non-reproductive in nature. They are reproductive misfits. As such, taking into sociological consideration same-sex parenting is already a step forward towards the undoing of the dominant heteropatriarchal matrix of reproduction. If Franke is right, and reproduction continues to be regarded as more inevitable and natural than heterosexuality, then taking into account biographical narratives of women who self-identify as lesbian and bisexual, and who became parents within a same-sex relationship, can contribute to dismantling a key premise of both hetero and repronormativity: motherhood as natural.

[9] Queen of Benefits Cheryl Prudham dubbed 'Britain's most shameless mum – read more www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/queen-benefits-cheryl-prudham-dubbed-8370786 and www.thesun.co.uk/news/2908640/cheryl-prudham-child-13-jail/ (February 2017).

Moreover, the topic of sexual dissidence and parenting can also fulfil an important theoretical and political call for decolonizing motherhood. More than two decades ago, Martha Fineman has said that the practice of motherhood is a symbolic space that has been occupied by patriarchal norms. According to Fineman, "[m]otherhood [is] a colonized concept—an event physically practiced and experienced by women, but occupied and defined, given content and value, by the core concepts of patriarchal ideology" (Fineman 1991: 290). In line with Fineman's call, this article is a contribution into the "futures of belonging and recognition" (Mamo 2007) that queering reproduction entails, taking seriously the responsibility of exploring the gendered specificities within the diversity of LGBTQ parenting (Ryain-Flood, 2009, Taylor, 2009).

Finally, the narratives we collected for this study demonstrate the need to deconstruct the ideology of the biological super-mum. This call is shared with other struggles in the realm of reproductive citizenship such as compulsory breastfeeding or the increasing visibility of politically regretful mothers. Furthermore, lesbian and bisexual practices of motherhood can play a significant role in desacralizing nature – nature is mutable, diverse, a work in progress. And so is the mother-child bond and so is parental love. There is nothing intrinsically natural in the decision to have (or not to have) children, in as much as there is nothing intrinsically natural in remaining partnered, single, straight or relationally diverse.

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Dating Apps in the Lives of Young Romanian Women. A Preliminary Study

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Abstract: The emergent field of study into mobile dating applications has focused primarily on American and Western European young adults, with consistent results. This study is intent on laying forth the basic groundwork for the extension of this inquiry to more culturally conservative groups such as Central and Eastern European young adults. In a culture where one third of adults consider that pre-marital sex is never justifiable[1], can dating apps make a dent in established 'traditional' courting rituals and family formation values? By means of self-reported quantitative research, we looked at how young women in Romania (N=155) perceive mobile dating apps, what motivates them to use online dating and what effects this usage has on their sexual and romantic relationships. More than half (54%) of the women who participated in our study reported having engaged in a form of offline relationship as a result of using online dating apps. Their motivations range from the desire to meet partners with similar interests, to simply passing the time. The intention to form a stable romantic relationship is only slightly dominant over finding partners for

[1]According to results of the World Values Survey wave 6, 2010-2014 (Inglehart et al. 2014).

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casual sex. The two intentions are clearly in conflict, resulting largely in quitting the usage of the app. Another reason for withdrawal from using the app has been the frequency of unpleasant experiences that they were exposed to in this medium. This suggests a connection between pursued outcomes and harassment in online mobile dating. Underlying user perceptions and behavior, responses indicate some unease in using online dating against the background of traditional dating. In turn, this leads to devaluing online dating as a desperate measure or an experience lacking in substance. The study offers preliminary insight into whether dating apps disrupt or reinforce values and behaviors commonly experienced by young Romanian women in traditional or offline dating.

Keywords: sexuality, dating, Tinder, dating apps, uses and gratification theory.

Introduction

The popularization of internet-based social technologies has produced fundamental changes in the way dynamic discourses, attitudes, values and practices intersect to create new, mediated constructs of social relations. In 2017, around 70% of global Internet users were also using one or more social media services (Johnson, Liu, and Peart 2017). The degree to which social media usage has changed behaviors in just two decades, as well as the growing availability of data, have facilitated the growth of social media research. Today, it is an exceptionally prolific field of study[2]. A more recent and less homogenous branch of social media research is the study of online dating through dedicated mobile applications (hereafter *dating apps* or *mobile dating apps*). Prompted by how the first popular dating apps challenged existing ideas about dating, sex and relationships, studies have predominantly looked at how these technologies have been used by North Americans and Western Europeans.

Why should we care about how Romanian, or Central and Eastern Europeans for that matter, use dating apps? Firstly, the sheer popularity of such apps raises a non-trivial problem: dating apps might be irreversibly changing our concepts of love, sex, and our relationship initiation

[2] One exhaustive meta-analysis of articles referencing a social network site identified 610 such texts between 2004 and 2011(Osch and Coursaris 2015), and this body of work has likely become much larger since 2011 due to the exceptional growth of Facebook (1 billion monthly active users in 2012, 2,23 billion monthly active users in 2018) (Facebook 2018).

behavior. Dating apps make meeting people easy and fun. They remove the social constraints and rituals involved in creating the right conditions for meeting a sexual or romantic partner, and they introduce a dimension of play by employing user interface elements that gamify dating (Albury et al. 2017; Nickalls 2017). Secondly, any significant consequences of dating apps usage that might be found in studies using American and Western European samples will likely manifest differently in Eastern European populations due to cultural differences and distances in values related to sexuality and family formation. As the past years have seen a global rise in the usage of dating apps, they have increasingly shaped the present and future of modern relationships across all of these populations.

We are interested in looking at how young Romanian women perceive the usage of dating apps and what their motivations and outcomes are in using the apps. Perceptions of app usage refer to the negative or positive attitudes that women hold towards using dating apps. By motivations, we understand any reasons invoked by the participants in our study as motives for signing up for a mobile dating app. Outcomes refer to how people's intentions for using an app are fulfilled or denied. In a larger sense, outcomes include any aspect of their user experience (swiping, matching, messaging) and changes produced in their offline social relations as a result of engaging with the app (starting an online relationship outside the dating app, going on a date, engaging in sexual activity, starting a romantic relationship).

Our research questions are:

Q1: How are dating apps perceived by young Romanians? Is there any stigma associated with using dating apps?

Q2: What are the most frequent motivations driving young Romanians to create a dating app profile?

Q3: What are the outcomes of using dating apps (i.e. do most people end up hooking up, starting a romantic relationship or a friendship) and do users get to actually move past swiping and messaging?

Conceived as an exploratory, non-exhaustive investigation, this study aims to provide several descriptive indicators about the usage of dating apps by young people (and specifically young women) in Romania. Our intention is to offer preliminary data about the local specificities

of the mobile dating experience, and how this experience might differ from that of young people in North America and Western Europe.

Dating apps: functions and usage

Mobile dating apps are social networks accessed via a smartphone, that use GPS (location tracking) in order to help connect people. Their purpose is to allow people in the same area to find dates, meet, chat, have casual sex, or potentially get involved with someone in a romantic way.

The most popular dating app worldwide is Tinder by all industry estimations, with the parent company confirming that the app was downloaded 40 million times by December 2014. Launched in 2012, Tinder's rapid growth is the most likely driving force behind tipping online dating from desktop to mobile in 2014, when an industry report estimates that the ratio of online dating users shifted to 60% mobile and 40% desktop (Dogtiev 2018). Like most mobile dating apps, Tinder relies on a mobile phone's GPS to match users located in proximity of each other. The paid subscription version of Tinder also allows for choosing a different location than the user's current geolocation. With Tinder, you get to swipe right (signaling you want to engage with that person) or left (to say that you do not). If the person whose profile you swiped right on swipes right back on your profile, then you have "matched." A "match" means the two parties are now able to start a conversation via an in-app text chat. Blocking or reporting someone is also usually possible in all dating apps.

Attempts at creating location-based mobile dating existed as early as 2003 through *proxidating*, a connecting technology using Bluetooth (Jung and Blom 2006). This was reported about in the Romanian press (Andone 2005), but we don't have access to any usage data. As expected, it wasn't until after the introduction of the smartphone that mobile dating really took off. The first app that differentiated itself through an unprecedented number of users was Grindr, a dating app for gay and bisexual men, or other men who have sex with men, which launched in 2009 and reached 6 million users by 2013 (Goedel and Duncan 2015). From 2014 onwards, Tinder continued to be the global market leader in mobile dating. In Eastern Europe, however, industry reports indicate Badoo as the most downloaded app (BBC News 2017). Not much is known so far about the use of any of these apps in Romania.

We consider mobile dating to have a different impact on internet users than online dating websites, as they are created to be easier to use and within one's reach all the time. Same as dating websites, mobile dating apps permit users to create a profile on their platform and provide a description about themselves, their lifestyles, as well as to add pictures on their profiles. Some criteria for setting up the mobile dating account include sexual orientation, age, and gender. Unlike dating websites, mobile dating apps are location-based, meaning that people can connect with other users based on their proximity, thus facilitating the chance of meeting face-to-face.

Dating apps: impact

Some of the first studies on online mediated dating show that about 10% of Internet users in the United States have met sexual and/or romantic partners online in the early 2000s (J. Katz and Aspden 1997; J. E. Katz and Rice 2002) and one third of American marriages developed from relationships started online between 2005 and 2012 (Cacioppo et al. 2013). The Pew Research Center has been monitoring online dating in the United States as early as 2013 (Smith and Duggan 2013). Their last report on the topic shows that in 2016, 15% of Americans have used an online dating service. Between 2013 and 2016, in just three years, online dating through a mobile application has spiked from 11% to 15% of the total American population (Smith 2016). When it comes to the demographics of online dating, we know that it has been used most frequently by 25-to-34-year-olds (Smith and Duggan 2013). However, mobile dating apps have driven usage growth among emerging adults between the ages of 18 to 24, a group that now reports using dating apps more than any other age group (24%) (Smith and Anderson 2016).

We know much less about online dating in Central and Eastern European countries. To the extent of our search up to mid-2018, we have not been able to find descriptive data about online dating usage in this part of the world. Some indications can be found in mobile industry reports or whitepapers, which point towards a total dating app uptake in Eastern Europe of around 9% (Startapp 2017), and show that the most popular dating app by number of downloads in this region seems to be Badoo (BBC News 2017). Central and Eastern Europeans have occasionally been sampled in connection with online dating in studies dealing with highly specific topics. To give only two examples, a Hungarian study looked at the addictive use of dating apps (Orosz et al. 2018), and a Polish study (Marganski 2017) looked at sexting among Polish youth. More research

is needed into the impact of dating apps on general dating behavior for the population of this region.

Dating apps: a potential disruption to traditional values about relationships through motivations and outcomes

Romania, and Eastern Europe in general, present an interesting case for testing how the rise in popularity of dating apps is affecting attitudes about relationships, because of the region's post-socialist culture of conservative values about sexuality and family formation. Are dating apps as used by Romanian women disruptive to socialized, commonly shared conceptions about sexuality and to common social practices of sexuality passed down from older generations?

Many Romanians still adhere to a traditional view of close personal relationships. This view includes attitudes against pre-marital sexual relations and support for the traditional family model. As mentioned before, World Value Survey data from 2012 shows that many Romanians are not favorable towards pre-marital sex (only 23.3% of up to 29-year-olds and 8.7% of people over 50 years old consider pre-marital sex to be morally acceptable) (Inglehart et al. 2014). Furthermore, a 2006 survey (Rotariu 2006) reports that 92% out of 1953 Romanian women surveyed agreed with the statement "to grow happily, a child needs a family with a mother and a father." A longitudinal analysis of the changes in values among Eastern European youths based on results of the European Value Survey from 1990 (Comsa and Rusu 2009) found that support of young Romanians for the traditional family model had increased from 2000 (-.018) to 2005 (.009)[3]. As defined by the authors, the traditional family model consists of attitudes towards 3 dimensions: "woman as a single parent," "marriage is an outdated institution" and "child needs a home with a father and a mother." In 2005, Romanian youth were the most supportive of the traditional family model out of all Eastern European countries surveyed by the EVS. Likewise, the study defines a model of sexual permissiveness (attitudes towards homosexuality, divorce, abortion and prostitution) and shows that support from Romanian youth for these dimensions has decreased between 1995 (.012) and 2005 (-.631)[4]. These results suggest that the case of Romanian views on

[3] Means of latent variable for pro traditional family attitude across the EVS waves for Romania as reported by Comsa and Rusu 2009.
[4] Means of latent variable for attitudes on sexual permissiveness across the EVS waves for Romania as reported by Comsa and Rusu 2009.

relationships is complicated by the fact that many Romanians in the younger generations are more conservative than their parents were at the same age.

Considering this evidence about the change in values towards a conservative direction, dating apps could hold some subversive potential. They operate on a more individualistic, pleasure- and gratification-centric level which clashes with conservative values about relationships and may alter how young people relate to each other.

Gratification in connection to media usage has been theorized by the Uses and Gratification theory (hereafter *Gratification theory*), which explains the sense of gratification derived from media usage through three types of motivations: physical, social and psychosocial (Valkenburg and Peter 2007; Tong and Van De Wiele 2014). An important aspect of analyzing the impact of mobile dating apps on youth values and behaviors will therefore consist of understanding the motivations and goals set by users engaging with these services.

According to some authors, the Gratification theory of media (Rubin, 1993) can be applied to mobile media usage too (Leung and Wei 2000). Of course, the Gratification theory takes a different turn when we talk about dating apps. According to this theory (Tong and Van de Wiele 2014), the gratification mechanisms can take a more explicit form, moving from abstract gratification (e.g. knowledge gained by watching a show or sadness felt after listening to a song), to more active responses, such as actually meeting a new friend, having a bad dating experience or engaging in a sexual act. In this sense, it is an agency-centered approach towards media analysis (Rubin 1993), which makes it a promising framework for the study of forms of media consumption that rely on high levels of personal engagement, such as mobile dating app use.

The outcomes of apps usage can depend on expectations from other potentially matching users of the same application. Recent studies (Ward 2017; Ranzini and Lutz 2017) have looked at this dynamic from the opposite direction: self-presentation, understood as the sum of actions through which users try to control how they are perceived. Ward (2017) found that most Tinder users aim to present themselves paradoxically idealized and authentic at the same time, and that sometimes they swipe right (indicating "liking" someone) on profiles of similar people, not just because they are attracted to them, but to learn how to be more attractive themselves.

The outcomes of dating apps usage also depend on the motivations behind usage, as shown by Gudelunas (2012) and Sumter at al. (2017). Both studies suggest that people who use dating apps for casual sex engage more in sexual relationships as a result of using the apps. The question

arises of whether the gratification of casual sex is in conflict with values regarding relationships which favor long-term romantic relationships or marriage.

Methods

Procedure: The questionnaire was applied online, between May 25 and June 6, 2018. Due to the intimate nature of the questions, and the nature of the interactions we were going to look at, we opted for online application.

Sampling: We have used convenience sampling by recruiting participants online, from among the members of Facebook groups of students from Cluj-Napoca. In the original sample, the total number of participants was N=192, with ages ranging between 18 to 34 years old and a gender distribution of 80,7% women, 18,2% men, and 1% other. Sexual orientation was 85,4% heterosexual, 10,9% bisexual, 2,6% gay or lesbian, 1% other. We have not excluded participants based on demographic criteria, with the exception of gender.

Due to the imbalanced gender representation in the total number of respondents, we limited our data analysis to a sample of female-only respondents (N=155). This was necessary based on the results of the one-way ANOVA test of variance between groups. The test returned significant differences between men and women for three of the survey questions: with how many people met on a dating app did you engage in sexual relations ($F=0.682$, $p=0.01$), romantic relations longer than 3 months ($F=2.495$, $p=0.01$) and friendship relations ($F=0.403$, $p=0.03$).

Across our final female-only sample, sexual orientation was: 85.8% heterosexual, 12.3% bisexual, 1.3% lesbian, 0.6% other.

Methodology: Quantitative study, survey.

Data analysis: Descriptive statistics.

Results

Who? Users and attitudes

First, we wanted to see what our respondents think of dating apps in general. More than half of the women surveyed believe that *dating apps are a good way of meeting new people* and do not believe that *dating apps prevent people from having long-term relationships*. Most also don't hold the negative attitude that *dating apps are for desperate people* (but some do: 16.1% agree that they are and 9.7% strongly agree). However, they are rather skeptical about the prospect of finding a compatible partner through dating apps (only 22.6% agree or strongly agree with *Dating apps help you find compatible partners easily*).

Table 1 Attitudes towards dating apps

	N		Mean	Std Dev	Frequency	Percent
	Valid	Missing				
Dating apps are a good way of meeting new people	155	0	3.61	1.07		
Strongly Disagree					5	3.2
Disagree					18	11.6
Neutral					46	29.7
Agree					49	31.6
Strongly Agree					37	23.9
Dating apps help you find compatible partners easily	155	0	2.76	1.09		
Strongly Disagree					17	11
Disagree					51	32.9
Neutral					52	33.5
Agree					22	14.2
Strongly Agree					13	8.4
Dating apps are for desperate people	155	0	2.62	1.25		
Strongly Disagree					34	21.9
Disagree					45	29
Neutral					36	23.2
Agree					25	16.1
Strongly Agree					15	9.7

Dating apps prevent people from having long-term relationships	155	0	2.49	1.19		
Strongly Disagree					37	23.9
Disagree					47	30.3
Neutral					41	26.5
Agree					18	11.6
Strongly Agree					12	7.7

When it comes to which apps are preferred, Tinder leads with 75.5% of respondents indicating that they have used it in the past or are currently using it. The second most used app is Badoo at 12.3%. Some also indicate having used OkCupid (3.9%). Less than 1% used Zoosk, Sapio, and others.

Table 2 What dating apps are you using now or have used in the past

	N		Mean	Std Dev	Frequency	Percent
	Valid	Missing				
Tinder	155	0	0.75	0.43		
No					38	24.5
Yes					117	75.5
Badoo	155	0	0.12	0.33		
No					136	87.7
Yes					19	12.3
OkCupid	155	0	0.04	0.19		
No					149	96.1
Yes					6	3.9
Zoosk	155	0	0.01	0.08		
No					154	99.4
Yes					1	0.6
Sapio	155	0	0.01	0.08		
No					154	99.4
Yes					1	0.6
Connected2me	155	0	0.01	0.08		
No					154	99.4
Yes					1	0.6
Omegale	155	0	0.01	0.08		
No					154	99.4
Yes					1	0.6

Once	155	0	0.01	0.08		
No					154	99.4
Yes					1	0.6
Happn	155	0	0.01	0.08		
No					154	99.4
Yes					1	0.6
Twoo	155	0	0.01	0.08		
No					154	99.4
Yes					1	0.6
Never used dating apps	155	0	0.21	0.41		
No					121	78.1
Yes					34	21.9
Don't know/Don't Answer	155	0	0.012	0.11		
No					153	98.7
Yes					2	1.3

The ages when most of the women surveyed started using dating apps was between 18 and 19 years old (34.8%), and between 20 and 22 (20.6%), while only 10.3% started using them before reaching 18 and only 11.6% after the age of 23.

Table 3 At what age did you start using dating apps?

	N		Mean	Std Dev	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
	Valid	Missing					
At what age did you start using dating apps?	120	35	2.48	1.02			
Before 18					16	10.3	13.3
18 - 19					54	34.8	45.0
20 - 22					32	20.6	26.7
23 - 25					14	9.0	11.7
26 - 28					2	1.3	1.7
After 29					2	1.3	1.7
Total	155				120	77.4	100

Why? Motivations

We did not identify coherent factors in the motivation to use dating apps in our data analysis. We did find a negative correlation (r=-.401, sig=.000) between *casual sex* motivation and the belief that *traditional dating techniques don't work nowadays*.

Table 4 What are the most important reasons for using a dating app?

	N		Mean	Std Deviation	Frequency	Percent
	Valid	Missing				
To meet partners with similar interests and tastes	155	0	0.7484	0.43535	116	74.8
To meet partners with similar values and beliefs	155	0	0.4645	0.50036	72	46.5
To find a long-term partner	155	0	0.3613	0.48193	56	36.1
To meet partners for casual sexual relations	155	0	0.3161	0.46647	49	31.6
Because traditional dating methods don't work nowadays	155	0	0.2581	0.43899	40	25.8
Because the app lets you know the person before you meet	155	0	0.3613	0.48193	56	36.1
Because I don't have time to meet partners through other methods	155	0	0.4065	0.49276	63	40.6
For fun/To pass the time	155	0	0.0839	0.27809	13	8.4

Among the motivations for choosing to meet in real life with a person found through an online dating application, good communication or conversation experiences over the app's chat feature was the most popular, followed by similar interests, while physical attraction or good looks came only third. Here is a sample of some recurring reasons formulated by those surveyed:

Good conversation: *I prefer to talk for a longer period of time to see if we resonate, then we usually move on to a social network where I can find out more things about that person from their profile (if we have common friends, if we have common interests, etc.); I met my boyfriend 3 years*

ago on Facebook. Before we met, we talked every day for about half a month. It was only after we realized we were getting along that I wanted to meet him.

Humor and a laid-back attitude: *If we have the same sense of humor; if we do not have big expectations from each other for when we meet and it's a relaxed meeting; If he behaves normally and he is not insistent.*

Physical attraction / Good looks: *What they look like, their pictures; What they look like in their pictures and how they approach you; My opinion is that physical attraction comes in first place, other things like common interests and aspects that impressed us come after*.

Personality: *If I like how he thinks, his personality, if he's polite; The fact that he's not just cute, but also affable; If he seems like an interesting person*.

Curiosity: *Curiosity. The more we talk, and we see that we have things in common, the more curious I am to meet them in real life.*

Table 5 Categorization of the answers given to the open-ended question "What makes you meet offline with a person found on an online dating app?"

	N		Mean	Std Dev	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
	Valid	Missing					
What makes you meet offline with a person found on an online dating app?	126	29	5.373	3.67638			
Good communication					54	34.8	42.9
Similar interests					19	12.3	15.1
Physical Attraction					11	7.1	8.7
Personality					10	6.5	7.9
Trust					7	4.5	5.6
Other					5	3.2	4
Compatibility					4	2.6	3.2
Out of boredom					4	2.6	3.2
Curiosity					4	2.6	3.2
Humor					3	1.9	2.4
Intelligence					3	1.9	2.4
Good grammar					1	0.6	0.8
Common friends					1	0.6	0.8
Total	155				126	81.3	100

How? Experiences and outcomes

In our analysis, *age* and *because of dating apps I started a friendship relationship* are positively correlated (r=.201, sig=0,012), meaning that as respondents get older, they tend to use these apps in a different manner, shifting away from romantic or sexual relationships and towards friendship. The Gratification theory does not take into account age differences in people's choice of media (see Greenberg 1974), so this is one result which may put into question if indeed this is the best framework for such a study.

Among the outcomes of using dating apps, more than half of the respondents reported that they have engaged in sexual relationships (53,5%). Fewer participants said that they went on dates (27,7%) as a result of using dating apps.

Table 6 Using online dating apps led you to:

	N		Mean	Std. Deviation	Frequency	Percent
	Valid	Missing				
Go out on dates	155	0	0.27	0.44		
No					112	72.3
Yes					43	27.7
Engage in sexual relations	155	0	0.53	0.50		
No					72	46.5
Yes					83	53.5
Start a romantic relationship	155	0	0.27	0.44		
No					113	72.9
Yes					42	27.1
Start a friendship	155	0	0.07	0.26		
No					143	92.3
Yes					12	7.7
Other	155	0	0.39	0.49		
No					94	60.6
Yes					61	39.4
Don't know/Don't answer	155	0	0.01	0.11		
No					153	98.7
Yes					2	1.3

Of our respondents, 79.4% acknowledged that they research their online dating matches on Google and social media websites such as Facebook.

Lastly, we looked at reasons why they stopped using dating apps. A good portion of those questioned stated that they quit using the mobile dating apps after entering a committed relationship and thus no longer needed them. However, a similarly large number of users ended up either bored or disappointed in their experiences. A disheartening share of those surveyed ended up leaving the dating apps because of harassment or other unpleasant interactions. Of our respondents, 20.6% confirmed they had had some form of unpleasant experiences because of using dating apps, and 8.4% of all respondents gave up using the apps because of these experiences.
A sample of the most common reasons for leaving an app includes:

Started a relationship: *I've met someone; I became monogamous; I've found a boyfriend on Tinder; I found my prince and didn't need it anymore; I've found the person with whom I'd like to have a relationship; I was in a relationship which got serious; I found the one :).*

Became boring: *It became routine; It became redundant, same conversations, most partners were looking for opportunities for sex; It became boring and tiring to meet new people and go through the same story/conversation over and over again. In the end I hooked up with someone.*

Toxic people/Harassment: *I ran into weirdos on it lol; I found all sorts of weirdos in my area; It became a pretty toxic environment; The messages became disturbing; I haven't stopped using the app, but if I had, it would've been because of the harassment or the contact with weird people; The people were too insistent and sometimes became obsessive.*

The apps weren't for me: *I installed Tinder out of curiosity to see how it is but uninstalled it the next day; I didn't find it interesting, because I'm not looking for someone, and I think it would be hard to meet someone who would want a serious relationship through this kind of app; Because of certain imposed limitations, specifically the fact that online dating apps completely eliminate the friendship stage, a stage I consider essential for a balanced and trusting relationship; I prefer dating in contexts that require face to face interaction; My lifestyle and values have changed, no longer being compatible with dating apps; I think that dating with the help of an online app isn't who I am.*

Other users were only interested in sexual relationships: *It was full of men who wanted something other than a relationship from me.*

Too time-consuming: *Lack of time; Not enough free time.*

Table 7 Categorization of the answers given to the open-ended question "If you have stopped using a dating app, what was the reason?"

	N		Mean	Std Dev	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
	Valid	Missing					
If you have stopped using a dating app, what was the reason?	74	81	3.12	2.20			
Started a relationship					30	19.4	40.5
Became boring					13	8.4	17.6
Toxic people/Harassment					13	8.4	17.6
The apps weren't for me					8	5.2	10.8
Other users were only interested in sexual relationships					6	3.9	8.1
Too time-consuming					2	1.3	2.7
I only wanted to try the app, wasn't looking for a partner					1	0.6	1.4
I prefer traditional dating methods					1	0.6	1.4
Total	155				74	47.7	100

Table 8 Did you ever have a bad experience during a conversation or a date with a person met through a dating app?

	N		Mean	Std Dev	Freq	Percent	Valid Percent
	Valid	Missing					
Did you ever have a bad experience during a conversation or a date with a person met through a dating app?	127	28	0.25	0.43			
No					95	61.3	74.8
Yes					32	20.6	25.2
Total	155				127	81.9	100

Discussion

Who? Users and attitudes

Generally, the attitudes towards dating apps of the Romanian women surveyed were positive, which indicates that no stigma was attached to using the apps. The only negative attitudinal trend was towards the idea that it's easy to find compatible partners on dating apps. We were unable to explain this attitude through the motivations and outcomes measured.

Tinder dominated app preferences, with Badoo placed on a distant second position. This differentiates our participants from other Eastern European users, who seem to prefer Badoo (BBC News 2017).

Why & how? Motivations, experiences and outcomes

Even though more than half of our respondents reported that they have engaged in sexual relations as an outcome of using dating apps, we see a comparatively low reporting of sexual gratification as a motivation for using the apps. Similarly, physical attraction is only the third reason for deciding to go on an offline date with someone met on a dating app. This can be an effect of the social desirability bias on self-reported data (Van de Mortel et al. 2008) or it can indicate a bias in participants' self-perceptions of their own motivations for using dating apps.

The gratification implied in the Gratification framework considers the engagement, active or passive, of the media consumer, and attempts to isolate within these forms of engagement their particular needs and the ways in which these needs are fulfilled through media consumption. Starting from this perspective, Sumter, Vandenbosch and Ligtenberg (2017) identified six main motivations for which young people use Tinder: casual sex, love, ease of communication, self-worth validation, excitement, and trendiness. Other studies have found four motivational factors, such as sex, love, self-esteem enhancement, and boredom (Orosz et al. 2018). Ranzini and Lutz (2016) adapted Van de Wiele and Tong's (2014) Grindr motives and gratification scale to Tinder and identified six motives: sex (finding sexual partners), friends (building a social network), a relationship (finding someone to date), traveling (dating in a different place), self-validation (getting an ego-boost), and entertainment (satisfying one's social curiosity).

In terms of the Gratification theory, the dating apps being used are all forms of media with a highly instrumental rather than ritualistic orientation. This means they entail an active, involved and goal-oriented engagement on the part of the user, rather than passive habit-based consumption (Rubin 1993). This leads to a much more motivated and therefore stronger outcome from media consumption, which explains to a large degree the types and patterns of usage we have seen with dating apps. As indicated above, over half of those surveyed did have at least partial success, despite the wide variety of their pursued goals, and ceased using the apps once they no longer adequately fulfilled their purpose.

However, this framework does not provide a complete picture of the way in which internalized attitudes affect media usage and expectations. While the Gratification theory does take into account the attitudes towards a particular form of media, and the ways in which they shape usage and expected outcomes, they heavily rely on self-reporting. Therefore, Uses and Gratification can, to a degree, tackle how explicit attitudes regarding media influence usage. However, internalized implicit attitudes are harder to identify and isolate. For example, the experiences some users had with dating apps were negatively affected by their perceptions (that dating apps are primarily for casual sex, that only desperate people use them, etc.), since, as we have seen, other users were successful in both starting relationships with the help of the apps, as well as developing friendships. However, in other cases, it is not clear to what degree the feelings that the interactions were forced, artificial, unnatural, repetitive, etc., were due to the users' own expectations of what dating apps entail, and thus whether their negative experiences were merely

"self-fulfilling prophecies", or if these negative outcomes are inherent in some aspect of the medium itself.

This leads us to the problem of attitudes and values surrounding sexuality and relationships. While, overall, our respondents behaved more liberally than other research on Romanian youth suggested (Inglehart et al. 2014), at least some displayed conservative attitudes towards relationships, albeit sometimes in subtle ways. There does seem to be at least a partially shared negative attitude towards dating apps, even among those who use them. This negative view of dating apps seems to be shaped both by its perceived outcome – casual encounters vs. stable, exclusive relationships – and by the fact that many of those surveyed assume that building a relationship through online interactions is somehow inferior to traditional courting rituals.

Furthermore, as we have mentioned, some users reported feeling that the encounters were monotonous or artificial. It would be interesting to focus further research on the relationship between these forms of discomfort with dating apps (as well as other forms of social media) and the internalized attitudes and beliefs of their users, in order to show more precisely if and how the latter trigger the former.

In what concerns the negative correlation we found between *casual sex* motivation and the belief that *traditional dating techniques don't work nowadays*, it is unclear if this is due to the respondents' expectations regarding the outcomes of dating being oriented more towards casual encounters, and thus traditional dating techniques being ill-suited for their needs, or because of some other underlying cause affecting both elements.

Dating apps such as Tinder may have limitations such as the scarcity of information characteristic of an image-based app. Creative strategies for surpassing such limitations involve searching for information about one's matches on other social media sites. One such strategy described by David and Cambre (2016) is to use reverse image searches. This is confirmed in our sample too, with a large majority of respondents confirming they use other social media sites to research their matches.

Conclusions, limitations and further research

The data explored in this study poses several specific questions. Further research is needed in order to understand the sources of the positive and negative attitudes identified. Our findings

regarding the motivations behind dating app usage do not neatly follow results of other studies in the field employing the Gratification theory. It is worth investigating whether this is simply for research design reasons or cultural reasons in connection with any potential stigma associated with using the apps or values about relationships.

In the UK, the Office of National Statistics (2018) found that more young people than ever identify as bisexual, with the total number of women who identify as bisexual increasing from 142,000 to 236,000 between 2012 and 2016. A significant share of our sample identified as bisexual (12.3%). This suggests that Romania may be undergoing the same trend. However, this cannot be verified for the time being, because we were unable to find statistical data about sexual orientation among Romanian youth, in order to have a frame of reference. It would also be worth exploring how bisexual dating experiences differ from heterosexual experiences. Are Romanians who identify as bisexual less likely to hold conservative sexual values?

Considering the widespread phenomenon of harassment of women on dating apps (Shaw 2016), it would be interesting to study how outcome expectations and instances of harassment relate, if at all, in the Romanian online dating environment. Moreover, while the presence of online harassment is hardly surprising, it is still unclear to what degree the values regarding gender roles that Romanian women hold permit them to perceive online male aggression as gendered harassment or as typical "boys will be boys" - style patterns of behavior.

The main limitation of our study is the non-probabilistic sampling procedure. To avoid any biases, no generalizations to the larger group of young Romanian women should be made based on our results. Rather, the study is meant as a starting point for further research on more representative samples which would address this limitation.

Within the limitations of our present study, it seems that our expectations that mobile dating apps would be disruptive towards previous, more traditional ideas and practices surrounding sexuality and relationships were met. The individuals in the studied sample behaved in more liberal ways than general data on their generational cohort would have suggested. Also, the discomfort with using the apps themselves, without reporting any negative experiences with the users, suggests that this shift comes into deeper conflict with traditional forms of courtship and relationships than other recent innovations.

Contributorship statement: Conception and design of the study, initial research, and drafting of the survey questions were done collaboratively and equally shared by MHP, AID and DP. SC advised and approved the final design and the survey, before we started collecting answers. All authors posted links to the survey in the student Facebook groups. An initial analysis was performed by MHP in consultation with AID. To this, SC added an equal part of new analysis, and checked statistical accuracy. MHP drafted the abstract, introduction, research questions, and contributed to the literature review results and discussion. AD contributed to the literature review. SC contributed to the literature review and drafted methods, results and conclusion, and checked the accuracy of the analysis. All authors have approved the final version of the article.

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Parents of "Pets?" A Defense of Interspecies Parenting and Family Building

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Abstract: In this paper, I advance the position that some relationships between human caregivers and their non-human companion animals ought to be thought of (and treated as) instances of parenting. Parenting non-human animals shares many of the same features as parenting human children, including similar (although not identical) rights, responsibilities, rewards, and challenges. I argue for increased visibility, recognition, and respect of this form of parenting, and draw out some of the moral and practical implications of doing so. Finally, I discuss challenges to my view, and ultimately argue that despite these potential objections, we still have significant reasons to value this particular form of parenting on par with other parenting arrangements.

Keywords: love, family, parenting, interspecies relationships**.**

For many women without children, the invasive line of questioning of "Why don't you have kids yet?" and "When are you going to have them?" is probably all too familiar. Childless or child-free[1] women who are perceived to be of child-bearing age are often subjected to these awkward intrusions into their personal lives and decision-making processes.[2] Packed into this common line of questioning are all sorts of assumptions about "real" womanhood and the essential

[1] I use "childless" to refer to someone who may desire to have children, but does not yet have them, perhaps because they are experiencing fertility difficulties or are otherwise physically unable to have children at this time. I use "child-free" to refer to someone who is childless by choice—someone who is not, and does not want to be, a parent to a human child. It is important to note the potentially ageist and ableist assumptions inherent in this line of questioning, whereby even strangers make rapid assumptions about their interlocutor's relative age and reproductive capacities based on outward appearance and/or presentation.
[2] I focus here on those who are perceived to be of child-bearing age and otherwise capable of bearing children, and the line of questioning they are likely to face as a result of not having human children. However, I also want to acknowledge the equally invasive line of questioning often faced by older women who do not have children, namely questions around whether they are lonely, have regrets about not having had children, and so on. These are equally problematic lines of questioning, rooted in the same gendered assumptions about the role of women and the value of childbearing.

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link between *being a woman* and *being a mother*. In a largely heteronormative society with rigid gender norms, it is often taken for granted that being a mother is not only an important social role of women, but it is part of what it means to *be* a woman and to *flourish* as such (Leskosek 2011, Meyers 2001). Women without children are often looked at as objects of pity: there must be something wrong with them, and it is unfortunate that they are missing out on the joys of motherhood, something which would surely imbue their life with meaning and value (Day 2016, Walker 2011). As Stephanie Wood (2016) describes,

> *[t]he dominant culture celebrates [only] two roles for women, each a function of female physicality: the desirable young woman and the mother. The drumbeat of the tribe wills me to believe that, even in the 21st century, I'm something other: selfish, empty, meaningless. On melancholic days, it's not hard to see myself as the incredible disappearing woman, an outlier. I feel the sting of the suffix: childless. Less. Less of a person, it seems to say sometimes, a life that's less.*

Feminist scholars and activists have pushed back against the problematic gendered assumptions that permeate this "casual" questioning routinely experienced by women without children. For instance, Jenny Kutner (2015) has argued that when we ask women why they don't have children, what we really want to know is "What is *wrong* with you?" "In a culture that glorifies motherhood," Kutner writes, "asking a woman why she doesn't have kids is almost always a loaded question." Though of course, as Gloria Steinem has pointed out, it is just as silly to assume that everyone with a womb needs to have a child as it is to assume that everyone with vocal cords needs to be an opera singer, nonetheless the pervasive normative assumptions remain firmly intact (Steinem quoted in Kutner 2015).

While feminist scholars and critics have challenged the gendered and heteronormative assumptions implied in these sorts of questions, in this paper I want to draw attention to yet another underlying assumption present in this sort of questioning, which has not yet been sufficiently attended to or adequately problematized in the literature. The assumption that I want to challenge is that human parenting is always necessarily directed at a *human* child or children. Instead, I suggest that it is reasonable and coherent for people to consider themselves parents, in a morally meaningful way, even if it is not human children that they parent. To this end, in this paper I argue that the meaningful caring relationships and deep bonds of love that some humans can develop

with some non-human companion animals[3] can mirror—and be on a moral par with—the parental bonds shared between human parents and their human children.[4] It is possible for these bonds between humans and their non-human companions to be the most morally salient relationships in some people's lives, and thus the moral significance of these relationships needs to be better analyzed and understood. Doing so not only highlights one important reason why directing questions such as "Why are you not a parent yet?" at those who care for non-human animals is disrespectful and fails to adequately understand their lived experience, but it also has implications for how we treat these particular caring relationships in the social and political sphere.

In section I, I will set the stage for my argument by showing that keeping companion animals in our homes is morally justifiable, despite arguments to the contrary. In section II, I offer a general analysis of the reasons why parenting is viewed as having the special sort of status and esteem that it does. My aim here is to break down some of the dominant norms regarding *who* can participate in parenting, and which relationship constellations count as family structures. After this, I turn in section III to my argument for what I call "interspecies parenting." I argue that, in certain contexts, it is justifiable to talk about the bonds between humans and their non-human companions as mirroring human/child parental bonds, or as sharing the morally relevant features of those relationships. On account of this, the paper aims to show that it is entirely reasonable for humans participating in these relationships to see themselves as parents, and to desire to be recognized as such by others. I draw out several moral and practical implications of my view in section IV. I address some potential objections to my view in section V, and ultimately defend the moral and political significance of recognizing this form of parenting as legitimate and morally valuable, despite these possible objections.

Before moving forward, a point of clarification is in order with respect to my argumentative scope. In what follows, I restrict my analysis and the arguments advanced to an examination of human caregiving relations with particular species of animals. Namely, I focus on caregiving relations with cats and dogs exclusively. In so doing, I do not intend to preclude the possibility of equally meaningful bonds with other non-human animal species. To the contrary, I think humans

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[3] Following Harvey 2017, I use "companion animals" to refer to those animals who live in a "home setting" with humans at least most of the time (Harvey 2017, 4).
[4] For an account of the reciprocal relation of love between humans and their non-human companions (i.e., dogs, cats, horses), and the moral significance of such relations, see Gheaus 2012.

can (and often do) have morally significant relationships with the many other animals that tend to live in close proximity with them, including but not limited to pigs, horses, rabbits, snakes, rats, and many other non-human species that offer companionship to humans. I want to be clear that it is not my intention to discount or minimize the moral significance of those bonds. Rather, I restrict my scope here to a focus on cats and dogs for several pragmatic reasons.

Firstly, I take cats and dogs to be paradigmatic representatives of companion animals with which humans often live and cultivate meaningful bonds of the sort I want to examine and argue in defense of. Data collected in 2012 by the American Veterinary Medical Foundation found that in the United States, 36.5% of households report having one or more dogs, and 30.4% report having one or more cats. This is quite significant compared to the other two companion animals counted, including birds (3.1% of households) and horses (1.5% of households). In considering humans who have companionship with cats and dogs exclusively, I am likely speaking about a much larger demographic than I would be with other companion animal species. Secondly, cats and dogs seem to be uniquely subjected to the scrutiny of "captivity" objections, as well as domestication arguments, both of which my argument needs to respond to sufficiently (objections which I take up in sections I and V respectively). Finally, the restriction I have chosen is pragmatic, insofar as the literature I am in dialogue with makes similar restrictions in scope: Harvey 2017 restricts her scope to cats and dogs given her personal location and background, and Norlock 2017 restricts her focus to cats and dogs because she thinks Harvey 2017 makes a compelling case that dogs and cats have unique and morally important capacities for love and loyalty to their human companions (see also Gheaus 2012). For these reasons, for the remainder of the paper, the category of non-human companion animals is taken to refer to cats and dogs exclusively.

I. Companion Animals in Our Homes: A Moral Defense

Some philosophers have argued that keeping non-human animals such as cats and dogs "captive" in our homes for our own benefit is always already an immoral act, insofar as we are denying these animals something inherent to their nature, such as their ability to live in the wild, hunt prey, and freely move about an unrestricted environment.[5] What I think this line of argument

[5] For representative articulations of "captivity" arguments against domesticated animals, see for example Gruen 2011, Gruen 2014, and Horowitz 2014.

generally misses is an adequate sensitivity to both history and context. If we concede to this view that it was immoral to domesticate certain animals in the first place, we have to reconcile this past (potential) moral failure with the position we find ourselves in in the present. The reality is that in the here and now, we have animals which (by our own doing) have become dependent on us for food, shelter, and companionship. Domesticating animals, whether or not that was the right thing to do in the past, has given rise to animals with *different natures* in the present—cats and dogs which now rely on humans, and also form significant bonds with them.[6] Removing cats and dogs from our home environments now, given this history of domestication and the resulting changes in their natures to live in close proximity with humans, would also be a moral wrong to the extent that these animals also gain something valuable from living in accordance with their present, evolved natures. And a moral wrong in the present does not undo a moral wrong of the past.

Not only would removing cats and dogs from our homes and our lives be a morally wrong thing to do at this point, it would also be impossible to give them the sorts of lives we think they would have had without domestication. Human beings have urbanized much of the space that would have allowed cats and dogs the possibility to live "in the wild." The sad reality is that there isn't much untouched "wild" or "natural" space to be found (Lebetkin 2014). Releasing cats and dogs into largely urbanized spaces, with the thought that it would give them the opportunity to live, hunt, and roam freely, relies on the false assumption that human activity hasn't radically reshaped the natural environment in ways that have also impeded the ability of animals to enjoy their "natural" habitats and live in accordance with their undomesticated natures. It doesn't follow from this point, however, that domesticated animals – in their presently evolved state – have ceased to have morally valuable lives worth living. To the contrary, the lives which these animals are now able to have, which ideally involve socialization and play with human and non-human others, can justify continuing to support and provide care to these animals, regardless of the possibility that their domestication was morally problematic in the first place.

While human beings surely receive benefits from living in close proximity with animals such as cats and dogs, that doesn't make it the case that bringing these animals into our homes and

[6] Jean Harvey (2017) makes the case that "thriving in a loving relationship with humans" has become part of cats' and dogs' telos, or nature (Harvey 2017, 1). Insofar as we are responsible for this evolved nature, humans now have the moral obligation to develop, nurture, respect, and protect the loving relations between humans and companion animals.

hearts is a purely self-interested act. At this point in history, when urbanization has reduced natural space, domestication has given rise to different natures in cats and dogs (involving socialization and contact with human beings). As human failures have led to overpopulation worries[7], cats and dogs also have interests in coming into loving human homes. Our non-human companion animals, in light of social and historical realities, benefit from the sorts of lives human companions are positioned to be able to provide for them. To be sure, taking cats and dogs into our homes and lives in our present context does not entirely right the wrong(s) of the past. What it can do, however, is provide animals in the present with opportunities for meaningful lives moving forward.

II. What's So Special about Parenting, Anyway?

In this section, I will look at how "parenting" has been defined and commonly understood, and also briefly suggest ways in which feminist and queer scholarship has been challenging the boundaries and norms of parenting. Through the lens of queer understandings of loving relationships, bonds of intimacy, and family structures, I defend a more expansive view of *what makes a relationship count as a parenting relationship,* and why expanding this understanding matters morally. On my view, what makes one a parent is a combination of the *desire or intention* to be in the role of parent, paired with the *drive to do the work* of care and other labor that is required by such a role. In order to show why this understanding of parenting is coherent, let's first consider other possible definitions of parenthood.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary offers the following definitions of parenting: (1) the raising of a child by its parents; (2) the act or process of becoming a parent; and (3) taking care of someone in the manner of a parent (Merriam-Webster 2017). The first definition is not very helpful for our purposes, since it defines parenting as an act done by parents, without specifying who or what can count as a parent. What is interesting about the second definition is the emphasis on the process—parenting is a process of *becoming* a parent (though again, what counts as a "parent" is left open and unspecified). The third definition opens the door for the possibility of parenting

[7] American Humane (https://www.americanhumane.org/about-us/) identifies the problem of companion animal overpopulation as encompassing two related problems: (1) allowing cats and dogs to reproduce with little chance of finding homes for the offspring, and (2) humans relinquishing their animals when they no longer can (or no longer want to) provide them care. As a result, millions of cats and dogs are euthanized in "kill shelters" when responsible homes are not found for them (American Humane 2016).

someone who one is not in the standard parental relation with, so long as it is done "in the manner of a parent." Clearly, there is a lot to be unpacked with all three definitions, and each relies on some further understanding of the parental role or relationship. I merely use these definitions as a starting point to illustrate the inherent openness and fluidity of the concept itself, even if its social meaning, or common use, tends to construe it more narrowly.

The central question underlying attempts to define parenthood is this: "In virtue of what does one become a moral parent?" where a "moral parent" is one who bears parental rights and responsibilities with respect to a particular child. Elizabeth Brake and Joseph Millum (2016) have provided possible answers to this question, distinguishing four possible bases for "moral parenthood": genetics-based, labor-based, intentional (or voluntarist), and causal accounts of parenthood, respectively.[8] Genetic theories ground parenthood in the relation of direct genetic derivation. Such a view radically restricts parenthood to biological parents, and would thus exclude many relationships we commonly deem as parental, most notably adoptive or "step" parents who become parents to children by alternative means to biological reproduction, and who likely share no genetic material with the child in question. Labor-based accounts of parenthood, on the other hand, view parents' work with and for children as the basis for their claim to parenthood, irrespective of genetics. On this view, people who play or have played a parental role in the child's life become parents, where "parental role" just means doing the work associated with raising the children in question, providing care, and so on. The intentionalist view (also called the voluntarist view) grounds parenthood in one's intentions—do they *intend* to bring a child into the world (i.e., by using technologies of assisted reproduction) or otherwise intend to enter into a parental relationship with the child (i.e., through adoption, customary care, or permanent kinship)? If so, then they become parents as a result of intending to be in that sort of relation. Lastly, some see parenthood as being grounded in causation. This view differs from the intentionalist view because it takes seriously that someone can causally bring something about without intending to do so, and possibly even in the absence of knowledge that they have in fact done so. More precisely, one could, for example, participate in the creation of a child without realizing their sexual actions could causally bring about a child. Furthermore, one could have participated in the creation of a child that they never find out has come into being (i.e., where someone is never notified that a pregnancy

[8] There are also pluralist accounts, which ground moral parenthood in some combination of these. For the sake of simplicity, I will not explore all such possibilities here.

occurred after a one time sexual interaction, or a sperm donor who never finds out that their sperm was utilized in an artificial insemination). These four possibilities offer varying (and very different!) understandings of what is essential, or necessary, for one to gain the status of parent with respect to some particular child or set of children.

It is noteworthy that of the four possible grounds of moral parenthood, only the first grants the status of "parent" automatically. On this view, to the extent that one's genes recombine with another's to create a child, that person simply *is* a parent. As easily as parenthood is achieved on this view, it also seems impossible to be taken away. On this view, then, it seems that one can never cease to be a parent, even if they have no contact with the child or otherwise play no ongoing parental role in its life. This is counter-intuitive, since many people opt out of their parenting duties (i.e., give their children up for adoption, walk out on their children and permanently cease to have contact), and cease to see themselves as parents, and/or lose the legal status of parenthood. Furthermore, other people can take up the parental role in relation to another's genetic child (i.e., through adoption or step-parenting relations). Any complete and coherent view of parenting needs to allow for both possibilities, and most importantly, for the recognition of the latter category (i.e., adoptive and step-parents) *as parents*.

The other three views of parenting can, in their own ways, account for this possibility. Each emphasizes the prospect of *becoming* a parent, through various processes including but not limited to intending to form such a relationship to the child (i.e., arranging for a surrogate birth), cultivating meaningful bonds over time, putting in the work of raising the child or giving them substantial care, and so on. These views create more space for the moral dimensions of parenthood (intentionality, responsibility, bonding, and care), and do not reduce parenthood to one's genetic contributions to bringing a child about.

I take it that the most convincing view of parenting (that is, the one that is best able to account for the many and diverse relationships that we call parenting in common discourse) is some combination of the intentionalist view (that which grounds parenthood in the explicit intention to enter into and maintain such a relation) and the labor-based view (that which is grounded in the work one does toward meeting the needs of a child and providing them with care). While providing a full defense of the strengths of this view of parenting over the others is beyond the scope of this paper, it is easy to see the limits of views that restrict parenthood to just those cases in which one

has contributed in some causal way (either genetically, or through contributions to assisted reproduction) to bringing a child into being. Such views exclude many relationships that are commonly accepted as parenting, especially those which are formed through the process of adoption. To the extent that we do not want our theory of parenting to exclude much of what common sense views of parenting include, it makes sense to rule these out as plausible understandings on the grounds that they do not include all that they need to include – their scopes are hopelessly narrow.

The two remaining candidates – intentionalist and labor-based views—are both insufficient on their own, but when brought together they seem to capture what is morally salient in relations commonly understand as parental. The labor-based view is insufficient as a stand-alone view of parenting because one could do work towards meeting a child's needs and not see their work as stemming from a distinctively parental relation (i.e., social workers, nurses or other health care providers, orphanage workers). Intentionalist views are also not enough on their own, since one could desire or intend to be a parent but fail to do the necessary work involved in caring for or meeting the needs of a child – needs that eventually end up needing to be met by other people. Combining these two views together results in an understanding of parenting that can capture both our common-sense understanding of parenting (i.e., does not preclude the possibility of adoptive parents) and helps make sense of the moral grounds of parenting (what is morally valuable about the parental relation). A parent need not contribute causally to the creation of a child to be recognized as the parent of that child, but rather must see themselves in that role, and subsequently do the necessary work to care and provide for that child. It is this combination of intention and work that makes parenting a morally significant relation.

This intentionalist/labor-based view is particularly attractive for my purposes, since a consequence of understanding parenting in this more expansive way is that it creates space for a variety of possible parental relationships beyond merely genetic ones. One can be a parent, on this view, regardless of biological connections to the child, so long as they intend to have this sort of relationship, and subsequently put in the necessary work to cultivate and sustain it. Such a view, then, allows for a cultural "queering" of parenting, that is, a deconstructing of the "ideal" normative family structure (a monogamous, heterosexual married couple with 2.5 kids, etc.) and opening parenting up to various forms of "postmodern" family (Park 2009). Some feminist scholars have

even argued that "queering" parenting is ultimately best for children, since marriage (and romantic love more generally) might be too fragile to serve as solid foundations (or indeed, the only socially respected foundations) for family (Brennan and Cameron 2015). If this is true, we would do better to disconnect child-rearing from its exclusionary normative ties to heterosexual marriage and biological reproduction, and instead shift parenting roles and responsibilities onto all those who desire the parental role and who aim to love, protect, and provide for the children in question.

Whatever parenting is (and I have argued that it is when one desires to be a parent and does the necessary work involved in caring for a child), and whoever we think has access to participate in it, there is no denying that there is substantial social value attached to parenting, and that the parent/child relationship is a significant one, socially and morally speaking. This is true both for the individual being parented (i.e., the one on the receiving end of the parental work), and, importantly for my purposes, for the one doing the parenting (i.e., the one doing the parental work).

Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift (2014) argue that the parent-child relationship makes significant contributions to the well-being and flourishing of adult lives. They argue that the parent/child relationship is of particular social and moral importance, since it bestows goods on the parents' lives that are not realizable in other relationships (of which they include relationships with pets). What is special about parenting on Brighouse & Swift's view is that they think parent/child relations confront parents with a genuinely unique combination of joys, challenges, and demands that need to be met by the parent, and that are unlike those found in other intimate relationships. "The parent is charged with the responsibility for both the immediate wellbeing of the child, and the development of the child's capacities" (Brighouse and Swift 2014). Children (read: human children) have both immediate interests in being kept safe, enjoying themselves, being sheltered and well nourished, having loving relationships with proximate others, etc., as well as long term interests in health, stability, and development.

Insofar as parenting is something that is given social status, and insofar as parenting is something that many people feel adds substantial value to their lives, it is important to recognize and appreciate parenting in its many diverse forms. While Brighouse and Swift explicitly deny that the caregiving of "pets" is worthy of the same status in our lives as that of human children, I will argue to the contrary that the sources of meaning and value attributed to the parent/child relationship extend to the parenting of companion animals. I will call this particular form of

parenting "interspecies parenting," because the parenting relation is happening across species lines. Insofar as "interspecies parenting" is simply another instantiation of parenting, it is worthy of equal social and political recognition and respect, a consequence I will develop in section IV.

III. An Account of Interspecies Parenting

In this section I aim to make the case that under certain conditions of affection and care, we can think of the bonds between non-human companion animals and their human caregivers as distinctly *parental.* By this, I mean that these relationships can also share the same morally salient features of parenting that have been said in Section II above to imbue parents' lives with meaning and which contribute to their flourishing. Many of the same rights (for instance, ultimate control over decision-making) and responsibilities (for instance, to provide shelter, food, and affectionate care) are all present in these relations, and the only substantial difference is the object at which they are directed, here being a cat or a dog as opposed to a human child. Furthermore, parents of non-human companion animals receive satisfaction and joy from similar moments and milestones: we are proud when our cat or dog socializes with others, listens and responds to us, learns new tricks or skills, and is overall happy, safe, and healthy. On the other hand, we experience similar degrees of disappointment when things don't go as we planned: when our cat or dog gets into something they have been trained not to or acts aggressively with others. In both cases (raising humans or non-humans), we aim, as parents, to nurture, to offer love, and to watch the object of our care grow, develop, and live as long, healthy, and fulfilling a life as possible.

It is important to note that while all parents are likely to share in the desire to watch those who are under their care grow, develop, and successfully hit certain milestones, this is always going to be limited by the extent to which the latter are realistically able to do so, upon taking into account various features, including age, cognitive development, dis/ability status, and indeed, species. Similarly, the length of time parents can realistically expect those under their care to live is also subject to a variety of limitations and extenuating factors. Factors that limit parents' expectations regarding what those under their care will be able to achieve or accomplish is not an exclusive feature of interspecies parenting. Rather, various things (i.e., chronic or terminal illness, mental or physical disability) can similarly impact the expectations we have regarding human children, their capabilities, projected lifespans, and so on. Even when these realities pose limits on parents'

expectations for their children, it doesn't make the relationship less significant or meaningful. To the contrary, caring for a child with complex needs can strengthen caregiving bonds, as can the realization that time together might be shorter than hoped.

The view that our non-human companion animals can inhabit the same space as children would in human caregivers' lives (thereby allowing those human caregivers to *become* or *be recognized as* parents) has not been seriously considered in the literature.[9] This is most likely because, as Jean Harvey (2017) critically notes, prominent views across the history of philosophy have assumed that non-human animals are not, and cannot be, moral subjects. Such views treat non-human animals as merely instrumentally valuable for human ends (not valuable for their own sake), and consequently, non-human animals are only objects of moral concern insofar as they are related to humans who *are themselves* moral subjects, with certain rights and who make moral claims on other moral agents.[10] Such indirect views of the moral wrong of harming animals were largely popularized in the work of philosopher Immanuel Kant and by those who have followed in his philosophical wake (see Nussbaum 2006, Potter 2005, Wilson 2018 for analyses of Kant's views on the indirect moral wrong of harming animals). For Kant, any duties toward non-human animals (i.e., not to harm them) are only indirect duties that piggyback on duties owed to other human beings. For Kant, only finite rational beings have the status of moral subject, and the only such beings are human beings. The trajectory of excluding non-human animals from the moral sphere (or, of expressing only indirect moral concern for them) has largely continued in the history of Western philosophy. Insofar as non-human animals are understood to lack rationality, and insofar as rationality has been viewed as a necessary condition for moral status, non-human animals have largely failed to be treated as full and proper subjects of moral concern.

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[9] There is hope that this will change, especially as interest in the uses of neuroscience (and particularly fMRI technologies) will increase the study of the role non-human animals play in humans' lives (and vice versa). One interesting example is a 2014 study by Stoeckel et. al that uses fMRI technology to show that patterns of brain activity are similar for mothers when they view images of their human child as when they view their dog (as compared to viewing human children or dogs that are not their own). Studies like this can help lend empirical support for the idea that there are similar emotional experiences and patterns of brain activation for mothers' bonds with their human and non-human children.

[10] A stark example is that on this view, there is nothing inherently wrong with harming an animal, but that act is only secondarily wrong insofar as it ultimately harms a human in some way. For example, if you kick my dog, this view would have it that you have not wronged my dog. Rather, you have wronged me, insofar as you have harmed something that stands in relation to me (or indeed, belongs to me, on some views that treat non-human companions as property).

Nevertheless, significant work (see for example Pluhar 1995) has been done in attempt to break down the rigid moral distinction typically made between human animals and non-human animals in our moral theorizing. Some philosophers (and animal ethicists in particular) have developed arguments in favor of seeing non-human animals as equally morally significant to human animals, and to ground that moral significance in something other than perceived rationality. One valuable contribution to this literature comes in the work of Anca Gheaus, whose 2012 paper titled "The Role of Love in Animal Ethics" makes the case for grounding our moral concern for non-human animals in our shared neediness, namely, our shared need for affection and companionship. On her view, rationality is not the salient feature that grounds moral status. Instead, what matters in determining moral status is the special importance of having needs, and needing others to meet those needs. Shifting the focus to meaningful relations (and especially those of giving and receiving love, affection, and/or care) offers a different starting point for theorizing about human relationships with non-human animals, and helps to justify the moral value of understanding and improving our ethical engagement with non-human animals.

Some philosophers who accept that animals do have an important moral status have largely focused their attention on the possibility and value of genuine friendship with animals. In other words, these moral philosophers who want to demonstrate the moral significance of human/non-human animal relations most often resort to doing so by arguing that humans and non-human animals can be genuine *friends* on various philosophical accounts of friendship (see for example Townley 2017). While this is surely the case (I have befriended many animals in my day!), these theorists never take the leap to attempt to show how we humans can also become *family* with non-human animals, on the basis of our current (and currently shifting) frameworks of the family.

There is, of course, an important moral distinction to be made between claiming that humans and non-human animals can be *friends*, as compared to claiming that they can attain the status of *family*. Just as human beings can enter into very different types of relationships with other humans (friendship, romantic, sexual, professional, etc.), we must also acknowledge that not all interactions and relationships with non-human animals are the same, or reducible to a single relationship form. The way I interact with a dog that I might care about but am not ultimately responsible for (i.e., a friend's dog that I visit on weekends and occasionally take to the park for a fun day out) is significantly different from the way I interact with the dog that lives in my home

and with whom I share my intimate space on a daily basis. The difference might parallel, for example, the very different relationships that I have with my friends' children, my niece, and my partner's children. These are all children that I love and care for, though my respective relations to them differ on the basis of the varying degrees of responsibility I have for their care, as well as the disproportionate amount of time, energy, and resources I devote to supporting their health and wellbeing. The types of relationships I have in each case (and the labels that subsequently attach to me: "friend," "aunt," and "step-parent" respectively) carry with them differing levels of responsibility, social status, and moral weight. Importantly, responsibility, as well as social and moral status, tend to track the distinction between friend and family, and the proximity to the child within the category of family (i.e., the status of one's relation to their own children is likely given more social and moral weight than their relation to, say, their cousin's children, in most cases). That said, the socially recognized boundaries of "family" carry with them profound social and moral weight.

Queer-theoretic thinking about the family has helped push these boundaries of what it means to love (and what can be an appropriate object of love) and what sorts of loving relations and family structures are available and accepted. Amy Rudy (2011) suggests that queer-theory frameworks can be useful in making sense of those who prefer to be in loving relation with non-human animal companions, and to live and share life with them. "Those of us who have primary partnerships and intense bonds with nonhumans," Rudy remarks, "know about queerness…." (Rudy 2011, 40). Rudy is pushing us to consider the ways in which this relationship form has been socially devalued, vis-à-vis dominant, nuclear familial forms. When interspecies relationships are chosen at the expense of (or are at least preferred over) other human-centered relationships, the people who choose them are viewed as "sad" or otherwise strange -- loners and "cat ladies" to name a few common stereotypes. Rudy suggests that thinking queerly can help us to highlight the moral value in these traditionally undervalued relations, ultimately undermining the stereotypical assumptions and negative value judgments associated with them. "Queer theory," she writes, "teaches us to recognize various forms of intimacy that are often invisible or erased in our culture" (Rudy 2011, 42). Building family with non-human animals, especially when these bonds are the primary or central bonds in one's life, tends to be looked down upon socially. Thinking queerly about what family structures are socially acceptable and worthy of respect can help us to highlight the moral and social importance of our interspecies familial bonds.

So why are these interspecies parental bonds so important—personally and morally speaking—and why ought we to consider them as on a moral par with human/human parental bonds? I argue that the morally salient features are the same, and are often observed to the same degree in interspecies parenting relationships as they are in parenting human children. Harvey (2017) points to several benefits that stem from a loving relationship with a non-human companion animal, which mirror those of parental bonds with human children: promoting calmness or relaxation through the sense of connection, cultivating a sense of pride or giving one's life meaning, offering an important source of social interaction, providing an outlet for care-giving behaviors, enabling the development of caregiving skills and other moral sensibilities such as empathy, etc. Through various gestures of attachment, affiliation, and dependence, relations with non-human companions (like those with human children) offer the caregiver a sense of being valued and needed (5).[11]

Maurice Hamington has provided a convincing account of the ways in which cultivating deep bonds of care with our non-human companion animals can "foment the development of care ethics, and, moreover, provide the habit and skill needed for moral progress" (Hamington 2017, 1). Not only is the practice of giving care important for our development as moral agents, but caring for non-human animals is a particularly beneficial means of doing this: the lack of narrative communication in these relationships demands a heightened level of non-linguistic responsiveness as well as an increased effort at empathetic imagination. The inability to communicate through a shared narrative language makes the role of *embodied* and *performative* caregiving even more crucial (Hamington 2017, 2). Elisa Aatola (2012) develops this point with a specific focus on animal suffering. Since suffering is a subjective phenomenon, and non-human animals cannot communicate their suffering to humans via a shared spoken language, human caregivers have to learn to recognize and understand their non-human animal companions suffering, and consequently their specific needs, in other ways (Aatola 2012, 165).[12] Again, learning to

[11] While I am focusing here on the benefits to humans that are gleaned from parenting non-human companion animals, it is also important to note that there is some empirical research that points to the benefit of these particular care relations for the non-human companion animals as well. For instance, a study by Horn et. al (2013) tested dogs' ability to complete problem-solving tasks in three test conditions, where their humans had various levels of engagement, presence and behavior ("absent owner," "silent owner," and "encouraging owner"). In a second experimental condition, the owner was replaced by an unfamiliar human. The researchers found that the dogs' duration of manipulating the apparatus and attempting to problem-solve as longer when the owner was present than absent, and also longer than when the unfamiliar human was present. Their findings lend support for the idea of an owner-specific secure base effect in dogs that is similar to that of human children.

[12] Of course, the inability to communicate one's needs via a shared spoken language is not unique to non-human animals—infants up to a certain point (and surely others who are otherwise unable to share in a narrative

understand and respond appropriately engages human caregivers' empathetic imagination, making them better caregivers more generally.

The cultivation of empathy, then, is essential to providing care well, especially to non-human animals. "Empathy," Antonio Calcagno argues, "allows us to personalize and feel into the life of our companion animals rather than just permitting us to give objective descriptions of them" (Calcagno 2017, 9). Empathizing with non-human animals helps us to recognize *their* subjectivity, and that we are just as much a part of their lives and wellbeing as they are ours. The cultivation of empathy "allows us to recognize that we share a world in common with our companion animals, and that this world is valuable and meaningful" for both parties (Calcagno 2017, 10). When we cultivate deep bonds with our non-human animal companions, we participate in the "co-construction of a shared life" (Townley 2017, 8). Our non-human companions are not to be treated as objects that we own and that we ultimately control. They are companions, in loving relation to us, and we share in the collective project of building a meaningful life together *as a family*.

Entering into caring relations with non-human animals allows human parents to develop as moral agents through sharpening their skills of performative and embodied care and empathetic imagination. "Interspecies parenting," then, not only brings a variety of the same joys and difficulties as parenting human children, as well as importantly different ones, but it also is a significant aspect of our moral lives.

IV. Why Does It Matter? Implications for Policy and Common Morality

I have argued that parenting non-humans can be just as morally significant of an experience, and the relationships just as morally valuable, as those between human parents and human children. In this section, I explore some implications of my argument for both common morality and public policy.

First, we might consider the impact that acceptance of my view could have on common thinking about the notions of parenting and family. It would require an expanded understanding of "family" to include non-human animals as members of the family in a non-superficial way (that

communicative language) also require that caregivers cultivate the ability to recognize and understand their needs without being able to communicate them via language.

is, as more than just nominally family members, but as family members on equal footing with other members). For instance, our decisions about how to act ought to equally consider our non-human animal companions' interests (i.e., would my cat enjoy being left alone all weekend while I go to the beach?) Recognizing our non-human animal companions as full members of our families also helps us to recognize and appreciate the significance of these relations for other people. Doing so might help us to better appreciate the significant grief some people feel when their non-human animal companions fall ill or pass away, but also the genuine desire folks' have to spend time with their non-human animal companions and to treat them with high levels of care and concern. Shifting our understandings of "parenting" and "family" to incorporate non-human companions is also helpful at the broader social level. It can help people who do not themselves have this particular sort of caring relationship to recognize its importance for others, in the same way in which, for example, an unmarried person might recognize the importance the marital relationship has in the lives of married folks.

In the domain of moral theorizing, expanded notions of "parenting" and "family" can help provide nuance and further development to the field of family ethics. In a recent paper, James Yeates and Julian Savulescu (2017) have argued that while there is a need for increased moral attention to our relationships with non-human companion animals, none of our currently existing moral frameworks (health care ethics, animal ethics, family ethics) provide the adequate tools to do so fully. They ultimately call for the development of a new sub-field of ethics, which they tentatively call "petethics," which would blend together features of these three already existing frameworks (Yeates and Savulescu 2017, 355). While I recognize their contribution as a step in the right direction, their conclusions do not go far enough, and introducing a new category of moral analysis, namely, "petethics," is undesirable on the grounds of parsimony. We do not need a new sub-field of ethics to analyze our moral relationships with our non-human companions if we are able to understand them as members of our families. Rather, we need to more fully develop the already existing sub-field of family ethics to account for this particular familial relationship, with its various moral dimensions of unequal power, vulnerability, and the need for giving and receiving care.[13]

[13] Throughout the paper, Yeates and Savulescu (2017) refer to non-human companions as having "quasi-family membership." Given my arguments thus far, to refer to it as "quasi" seems to miscategorize the relationship and its significance, and anyway, Yeates and Savulescu give no real argument as for why they think this represents only

Finally, a shift in the common morality with regards to how we view non-human animal companions (as full members of our familial lives) might have the effect of establishing secondary moral obligations on others in the community to support these family structures. Drawing on Eva Feder Kittay's work on "dependency relations," Kathryn Norlock (2017) argues that adoptable animal companions make moral demands on all of us—even those who refuse to take on [direct] caregiving roles for themselves. Those who choose to remain "petless" do not avoid these demands, but rather have *different* [secondary] obligations to support those who take on these caregiving burdens in their place (Norlock 2017, 3). "Petless" folks who are able, Norlock argues, are under an obligation to contribute to the creation and maintenance of supportive social and political conditions for care. This can include: fostering cats or dogs, centering local shelters' concerns in community affairs, donating money, prioritizing shelter funding, in political and non-profit gatherings, volunteering our time, donating wish-list items to shelters, and speaking or writing to encourage human companions to spay/neuter their cats and dogs (Norlock 2017, 12). The idea here is that we enter into "secondary dependence" relations with adoptable companion animals, in parallel ways that we enter into them with other humans who we are not directly responsible to care for. When we see the importance and value of caregiving for non-human companions, we then recognize the responsibility we all have to cultivate supportive networks and circumstances for care.

In addition to querying our moral understandings about non-human animal companions, we can also consider what policy conclusions can be logically drawn from the view I have put forward and the shifts in moral thinking it requires. If we come to see these relations as instances of parenting in the moral sphere, then it follows that we ought to treat them as such in the sociopolitical sphere.

So, what sorts of practical changes would my view require? For starters, some amount of fairly simple accommodations, which are already afforded to parents of human children, would be in order. Some examples that come to mind include the opportunity for priority boarding on airplanes or other forms of transit, or priority parking in shopping malls or grocery stores, when one is traveling or shopping with their non-human companion. These privileges are put in place

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"quasi-family membership." If they were willing to drop the talk of "quasi" membership, and just see non-humans as family members, there would be no need to suggest an entirely new sub-field of ethics to make sense of these moral relationships—they would simply be explored under the category of family ethics.

for parents to make things easier, or at least more convenient, as they navigate the world while also caring for a dependent child. Those parents who are shopping or traveling with non-human companions could benefit from the opportunity to utilize some or all of these conveniences which are already in place, to make their engagement in these tasks a little easier.

The more potentially challenging cases are ones that directly invoke the law, viz., where a change in the existing law would be necessary to accommodate parents of non-human companion animals in order to obtain full recognition as parents. One example regards housing regulations in the United States. At present, in most states, it is at the discretion of landlords whether or not they will accept "pets," and they are able to make this individual judgment call precisely because the law views non-human animal companions as "pets." I say this because when the animal in question is seen as more than a "mere pet," (i.e., when it is a licensed therapy or emotional support animal), it is no longer at the discretion of the landlord to allow them or not—they simply have no choice but to allow the non-human animal companion and their human the ability to rent the facility in question (Brewer 2005). This example makes it clear that how we view animals and the roles they are playing in our lives has implications for how they are treated in our codes, polices, and laws. Importantly, if our non-human companion animals were legally recognized as family, they would receive more legal protection from things like housing and other discrimination(s).

Two further examples where the law would need updating to reflect the shift in how we view non-human animal companions are (1) extending parental benefits, such as paid family leave after the adoption of a new non-human animal companion for bonding, or to care for ill companions; and (2) grievance leave from school/work upon the illness or death of a non-human companion animal. Both of these changes would require a change in the law as it stands, as well as implementation in schools and workplaces to accommodate the legal recognition of our non-human companions as full members of our families. However, if my arguments for viewing non-human animal companions in this way are correct, doing so appears to be a matter of justice.

V. Considering Possible Objections

To some, what I am proposing is going to seem radical, and too far removed from how the vast majority of our society commonly understands parenting. While I agree that accepting my view

requires a radical shift in widely shared intuitions and social norms around parental love and the boundaries of family, I don't think this itself can be a reason not to accept it. Many major social changes to how we view love, relationships, and families have taken place over time, which contribute to the breaking down of narrow, exclusionary visions of family and which aim to increase visibility and respect for alternative, non-dominant family forms. Some obvious examples include the US Supreme Court cases of *Loving V. Virginia* (1967) and *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015). The former amounted to the legal recognition of interracial love through the institution of marriage, the latter extended that institution even further to include same sex couples. Neither was without resistance and criticism, as both cases represented a major challenge to the social status quo. However, they ultimately represented the ability to reconceptualize how the law (and eventually common morality) thinks about these fundamental institutions of love, marriage, and family. The (incredibly) difficult task of changing the law, or changing individual hearts and minds, is not sufficient to render a project useless or not worth undertaking. Perhaps heavy resistance signals that the project is needed even more.

Another concern that some might have about my view involves questions of power, vulnerability, and control, given the inevitable hierarchies at work in these caring relationships. Some scholars have drawn out the dangerous elements of these relationships, due to the inherent power imbalance which make the "weaker" party vulnerable and prone to control and/or emotional and physical abuse (Carlisle-Frank and Flanagan 2006). The worry reflected in this line of objection is that the human party is always going to be in a position of heightened control relative to the non-human. Such power leaves the non-human more vulnerable—the human has more control over the physical environment, the relationship itself, and ultimately the physical and mental wellbeing of the non-human companion. Any such relationship that includes vast differentials of power has the potential for abuse: note the unfortunate realities of spousal abuse, child abuse, elder abuse, abuse of disabled folks, workplace harassment, and countless other pervasive examples). So, non-human animal companions are not unique in the way their lesser power positions them in a way that makes them more vulnerable—many of our most important caring relationships are like this.

While it is clearly important to be attentive to the power dynamics at play in any caring relationship, their mere presence and the risks that follow from them do not undermine the moral

value of the relationship form itself. We view many relationships that occur across relative differentials in power as rewarding and worthwhile, all the while acknowledging their many risks. Instead of pointing to the potential risks as possible reasons to reject the relationship form outright, or deem it immoral for this reason, I think it is more fruitful to instead focus on thinking about healthy and mutually enriching ways to conduct these relationships of love and care across unequal power. Doing so helps protect the vulnerable parties, and also creates more stable loving bonds for all who engage in these various caring relationships.

Furthermore, shifting how we view the relationship that humans have to non-human animals can actually help weaken the strength of this power imbalance and the vulnerabilities that arise as a result. At present, where non-human companion animals are likened more to property than to full members of our families, they have fewer legal protections and significantly less moral weight in our lives than they would if we made the moral shift to view them as proper members of our families. If we reinterpret these existing relationships – away from mere property relations and toward parental ones – we begin to make our non-human companion animals less vulnerable than they currently are.

The final objection that is likely to be raised against my view is that I am being overly sentimental, and/or that I am anthropomorphizing—animals simply cannot engage in a loving *relationship,* where the relationship requires reciprocity. I want to respond to this by challenging what we typically think it means for love and care to be meaningfully reciprocated. Amy Mullin (2006) gives an account of how very young children (i.e., before they are able to speak) can reciprocate care to their parents in a way that expresses mutual affection and concern. Human babies have non-verbal ways of responding to their parents' emotions, and even helping to communicate their needs to their parents, and this constitutes reciprocity *in that context.* I want to suggest that if we have too narrow a view of what it means for one to reciprocate care, we are going to exclude many caring relationships among humans which we might not want to exclude. These include, most obviously, relationships with small children, but also those with severely disabled individuals who might also lack the ability to reciprocate in "more obvious" ways, such as through spoken language, writing, or various other forms of intimacy which humans often use to signal or express their care or concern for others, but which might be limited to only those humans who possess a certain degree of cognitive development and function. It seems needlessly

biased and restrictive to only recognize a narrow range of methods for communicating affection, care, or concern. Sometimes the role of physical touch, facial expression, and overall demeanor can go a long way to show care when a shared language is unavailable. If we broaden our understanding of what counts as expressing care, we can see that non-human animals can reciprocate loving bonds with their caregivers, and can indeed show them immense love and affection.

VI. Concluding Remarks

This paper has advanced the view that in many cases, relationships between human caregivers and non-human companion animals constitute genuine instances of parenting, and deserve to be recognized and respected as such. Parenting non-humans shares many of the same features that make parenting human children morally valuable, and also involves many of the same rights and responsibilities. To fail to treat these relations as instances of parenting can amount to a disrespect to the parties of the relation—it undermines the value of their loving bond and caring relationship, and continues to reinforce narrow conceptions of the sort of parenting that is taken to matter, socially and morally.

The view on offer is not without moral and practical consequence. If we as a society are able to see these relationships as instances of parenting, we are more likely to ascribe to them the level of value and esteem typically reserved for intra-species parent/child relations among humans. This not only shifts our normative understandings of parenting and family, but also pushes us towards shifts in the policy arena—shifts that demand social and political recognition of this parenting form. The hope is that we, as a society, can begin to make this particular form of parenting both more visible and more accepted as a meaningful outlet for caregiving and parental love. Maybe then will those who are already caring for cats and dogs stop being asked the question, "But when are you going to become a parent?"

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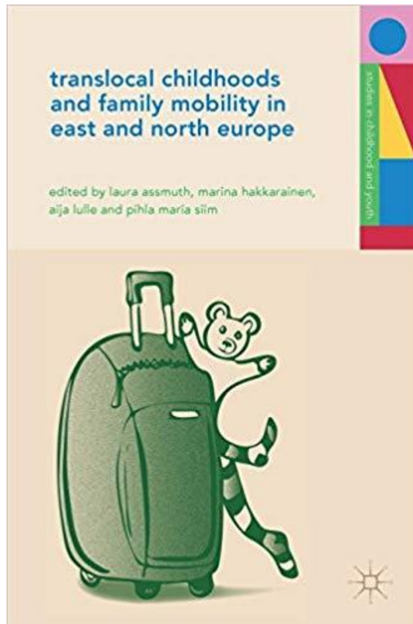
BOOK REVIEW



Translocal Childhoods and Family Mobility in East and North Europe

coord. Assmuth L., Hakkarainen M., Lulle A., Siim P.M.

Ed. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.
ISBN: 978-3-319-89733-2 (hardcover)
ISBN: 978-3-319-89734-9 (eBook)

Book review by **Frank Elbers**

This edited volume is one of the first in the literature on migration to focus on how children experience and understand mobility and migration. Even in research on family migration, little attention has been paid to children's viewpoints, and in research on labour migration families are often not even mentioned. The contributing authors -- Laura Assmuth (University of Eastern Finland), Marta Balode (independent researcher, Riga), Agnese Bankovska (University of Helsinki), Anca Enache (University of Helsinki), Marina Hakkarainen (European University at St. Petersburg), Aija Lulle (Loughborough University), Airi Markkanen (independent researcher, Helsinki) and Pihla Maria Siim (University of Tartu) -- use an ethnographic perspective to fill this research gap. "By filling this research gap, we want to provide an in-depth understanding of how children 'do families' during famililу mobilities of different kinds." (p. 5)

Assmuth *et al* take issue with the concept of "transnational" mobility or migration, which has been very much in vogue in the past two decades. Instead, they propose to speak about "translocal" mobility. They argue that a transnational approach can get trapped into a "methodological nationalism" as it relies on analyses of national/ethnic groups primarily in terms of their homeland/national state and national identification. Instead, "a translocal approach does not oppose internal and international migration/mobility and analyses everyday practices as experienced and narrated by both mobile and immobile family members". (p .7)

In their analysis, the contributors use three intertwined conceptual strands. First, they try to provide insights into how childhood should be understood as an *embodiment process*. The best example of this is how children experience food. "Translocal taste buds serve as a means of adjustment, belonging, liking, disgust and, most importantly, sense making. Experiences through localized tastes – both while on the move and when staying put – either facilitate, strengthen or at times also weaken relationships between children, their family members, friends and places." (p. 55) Second, the authors highlight the "role of *physical and immaterial structures* that are crucial in the creation, organisation and maintenance of translocal childhood practices." Schools, for instance, constitute a central role in children's lives and institutions such as kindergartens are key everyday infrastructures. The third conceptual strand is that through a nuanced attention to relationships the researchers try to come to a better understanding of *children's agency* in the mobility experiences.

The book is organised according to these three conceptual strands. *Part I: Introduction* contains the introductory chapter "Children in Transnational Families" by Assmuth, Hakkarainen, Lulle and Siim. *Part II: Embodiment* includes the chapters "And so the Journey Begins: An Embodied Approach to Children's Translocal Materialities" (Bankovska and Siim), "Doing Translocal Families through Children's Names" (Balode and Lulle) and "Sensitive Ethnography: A Researcher's Journey with Translocal Roma Families" (Markkanen). *Part III: Infrastructure* comprises of "Summer Spaces: Infrastructures, People and Animals in the Baltic Summers" (Lulle and Siim), "Experiencing Inequality: Children Shaping Their Economic Worlds in a Translocal Context" (Hakkarainen) and "School as Institution and as Symbol in Estonian Migrant Families' Lives in Finland" (Assmuth and Siim). *Part IV: Agency* includes chapters on "Children's Agency in Translocal Roma Families" (Enache), "'Becoming Better' Through Education: Russian-Speaking Youngsters Narrate Their Childhood Agency in Finland" (Hakkarainen) and "Age Matters: Encountering the Dynamism of a Child's Agency from Cradle to Emerging Adulthood" (Lulle).

In case studies, the book explores mobility from Estonia and Latvia to Finland, from Latvia to the United Kingdom, from Russia to Finland, and cyclical mobility by the Roma between Romania and Finland. Topics include naming practices, food (probably the one aspect that stands out most in children's experience and their sense of belonging), travel, schooling, summer holidays (both children and their grandparents look forward to spending long Baltic Summers together!),

economic and other inequalities, and the importance of age in understanding children's lives. The case studies, *inter alia*, dispel the moral panic among child protection agencies and public opinion about "children left behind" or "migration orphans" in Central and Eastern Europe when parents migrated after the 2008 financial crisis to find work elsewhere. Migrating parents organise wide networks of support for their children through friends and relatives (grandparents, aunts & uncles).

Although the authors claim that age and gender need to be investigated and not assumed as they are interrelated in complex ways with translocal family life, a gender perspective is not fully developed in the case studies. Except for chapters authored by Lulle and Enache, who describe gendered dimensions of marriages between Latvian women and non-Latvian men, for example, and the gender roles in Roma communities – little attention is paid to how boys and girls experience mobility differently, or how, for instance, expectations about gender roles can be different in both the country of origin and destination. Do boys have more agency than girls? And what about the decision-making process to migrate and/or return; mothers or fathers that stay behind with or without children; caring responsibilities? These are some of the questions that the researchers could have addressed.

Translocal Childhoods and Family Mobility in East and North Europe is an important contribution to the literature on both migration and mobility and the field of childhood and youth studies. It addresses many methodological and ethical considerations when doing ethnographic research of children and their families. Full of rich detail of how children and young adolescents experience (circular) mobility and migration, professor Assmuth *et al* describe through lively case studies how they become part of, and evolve as, members of "translocal families."

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