

On the Possibilities and Impossibilities of Love:  
Mapping the discursive field of love-relationships, its components, conflicts and challenges.

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## ABSTRACT

Title: On the Possibilities and Impossibilities of Love: Mapping the discursive field of love-relationships, its components, conflicts and challenges.

In this thesis I reframe theories of love-relationships in late modernity (by Anthony Giddens, Zygmunt Bauman and Ulrich Beck & Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim) in relation to a general framework of discursive theory (inspired by Michel Foucault). I suggest that current developments and contradictions in the field of love-relationships with advantage can be understood in terms of discourse and discursive conflict. Utilizing the discursive framework, I conceptualize two conflicting discursive regimes (as *romantic love* and *individualized freedom*), and their components. With these components in mind, I explore how contradicting discursive components are problematized in established risk-discourse, using cases of popular culture as illustrative reference. Risk-discourses force short-term practical solutions, and put pressure on further discursive change by inducing anxiety and cognitive dissonance. Future discourse will have to adapt to several conditions, including the (in)compatibility of discursive components, how well practical strategies work out, how social interaction is organized, and how discursive deconstruction unavoidably have consequences for the fundamentals of love itself.

Keywords: Love ; Relationships ; Late modernity ; Discourse ; Risk

## ABSTRACT IN SWEDISH

Titel: On the Possibilities and Impossibilities of Love: Mapping the discursive field of love-relationships, its components, conflicts and challenges.

I uppsatsen omtolkar jag senmodernitetsteorier om kärleksrelationer (av Anthony Giddens, Zygmunt Bauman och Ulrich Beck & Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim) till ett generellt diskursteoretiskt ramverk (inspirerat av Michel Foucault). Uppsatsen redogör för hur samtida utvecklingar och motsättningar inom fältet kärleksrelationer med fördel kan förstås i diskursteoretiska termer. Med hjälp av detta ramverk utvecklar jag två diskursiva regimer och deras respektive komponenter (konceptualiserade som *romantisk kärlek* och *individualiserad frihet*). Med dessa komponenter i åtanke granskar jag hur konflikterande komponenter problematiseras genom etablerade riskdiskurser, med fallstudier av populärkultur som illustrativa exempel. Jag menar att dessa riskdiskurser driver fram kortsiktiga praktiska lösningar, och orsakar ångest och kognitiv dissonans vilka motiverar ytterligare diskursiva förändringar. Kommande diskursiva förändringar måste förhålla sig till flertalet omständigheter inklusive diskurskomponenternas (in)kompabilitet, huruvida praktiska lösningar är hållbara, hur social interaktion organiseras i allmänhet och hur diskursiv dekonstruktion oundvikligen får konsekvenser för kärlekens fundament.

# Preface

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I wish to thank Dr. Åke Nilsén, Dr. Martin Berg, Filip-Isander Ahderinne, Hanna Anagrius, Salle Ottmar and my mother Dr. Margareta Strandell; you have all played direct or indirect roles in making this thesis what it is – whether you know it or not. I also wish to thank theorists such as Michel Foucault for changing the world, and contemporary theorists such as Anthony Giddens, Zygmunt Bauman and Ulrich Beck & Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim for their invaluable stimulation of my own understanding of the social world we live in. Not to forget all empiricists who supply the fuel to the theoretical fires!

Thank you!

Jacob Strandell  
Halmstad, Sweden, in May 2012

*“In our monogamous part of the world, to marry means to halve one’s rights and double one’s duties.”*

*“A man can be himself only so long as he is alone; and if he does not love solitude, he will not love freedom; for it is only when he is alone that he is really free.”*

- Arthur Schopenhauer ([1851] 2007)

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# Chapter 1: Introductions

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## 1.1 Introduction

In the eyes of the social constructionist love is contingent and forever changing. An essentialist would on the other hand claim that love itself is inherent, but perhaps our practice is culturally dependent. As a constructionist I would then argue that the apparent intuitive essentialism of love is a part of the way we construct love as an eternal force inherent in human beings. I do not doubt that the physical feelings we feel when in love are very real, and some may even exist without and learning or cognitive components, inborn in all social animals<sup>1</sup>. But exactly how we feel, and the meanings we ascribe to the reactions of the autonomic nervous system, depend on cognitive definition. In order to feel, we must also construct a situation in a certain way. Love is only love when these reactions are made intelligible through a discourse of love.

Since I interviewed relationship anarchists a year ago I have been obsessed with the discourse of love. I come across its discourse everywhere and everyone are relating to it in some way, including myself and my romantic partners. There are obviously ways love is created and made real, summoning feelings of intimacy. But even though the discourse of love unavoidably shapes our lives, it is not receiving much attention. I had to create a way to understand these discourses – and the result is this thesis.

Prominent social theorists, such as Anthony Giddens, Zygmunt Bauman, Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, have already theorized on how of processes of late modernity influences the practices of love-relationships. The purpose of this theoretical thesis is to frame these processes within a general theory of discourse in order to further develop, and detail, the sociological understanding of the cognitive aspect love-relationships. A theory of discourse ties macro level abstractions to micro level practices/cognitions in a post-structuralist fashion. I use this framework to suggest how some problematized conflicts, which real people reflexively relate to and act upon, might be understood. A discursive perspective enhance understandings of how late modern love-relationships are simultaneously tied together and contradictory, and how the discourse/practice of love-relationships are under strain for further changes.

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<sup>1</sup> Such as feeling connected to or caring for someone.



## **1.2 Positioning, purpose & objectives**

### *1.2.1 Between grand narratives and realities*

The theories of late modernity are each written as its own grand narrative, i.e. a theory which through a few key processes and concepts attempts to explain almost everything social in sweeping arguments of humongous abstractions. They make no explicit effort to incorporate themselves within general sociological theory and avoid conforming with previously developed understandings. These grand narratives have a structuralist character in the sense that their grand abstractions are reified and appear to have an external deterministic influence on people, while themselves appearing independent from everyday (re)construction. These theories conceptualize processes outside, above and beyond the people whose lives they are said to control.

I use these grand narratives in relation to a theory of discourse in order to describe what they lack; the relationship between macro processes and micro practice through discourse. This is a poststructuralist middle ground between grand abstractions and everyday life, which I assume with the intention of dissolving the arbitrary distinction of structure/actor. Grand abstractions are but one way of constructing an understanding of the social, and the concept of discourse is another. In order to avoid reification it is important to understand that this is nothing but various ways of representing the social. Neither perspective is 'truer' than the other, but they can be useful in different ways.

There is both a relationship between grand narratives and theory of discourse, and a partial overlap of the two. On one level theories of grand abstractions are of course discourses on reality; just as theories of discourse is discourse on discourse. On another level, grand abstractions are simplified understandings of social processes and institutions, both discursive (cognitive, cultural) and organizational (policy, action, material factors), while the discursive perspective focuses on the details of discursive aspects.

A theory of discourse supply additional value over grand abstractions as a model of how social processes are reproduced in everyday practices, not as coming from outside of people but through the ways people (inter)act. A theory of discourse serves several purposes where the grand narratives are lacking: 1) it describes abstract processes and their concrete relation to the subject, 2) it details how processes, as discourse change over time, and 3) it explains how grand abstractions influence people's lives through their own choices, without external deterministic force.

### *1.2.2 Purpose and objectives*

The purpose of this theoretical thesis is to further develop the sociological understanding of the discursive field of late modern love-relationships by reframing previous theory. As is argued in this thesis, with the support of established theories, the discourse of love-relationships is now the sole institution keeping these relationship practices somewhat stable<sup>2</sup>. Understanding the destabilization of the discursive field, and its contradictions, in detail is necessary to understand the changing practice of love-relationships and future changes. By synthesizing the theories of late modern processes with a theory of discourse, I aim to develop a detailed understanding of the discursive conflicts at hand.

The objectives of the thesis are the following:

- a) To frame the theoretical works on love-relationships in late modernity within a theory of discourse.
- b) To use these theories in primarily discursive terms in order to analyze the components of major discursive regimes and to describe their contradictions in concrete detail.
- c) To describe established and explicit risk-discourses as problematizations of conflicting discursive regimes.

## **1.3 Boundaries, delimitations and reservations**

### *1.3.1 The theoretical scope*

A crude and arbitrary distinction can be made between two levels of sociological mechanisms. On one hand, there is theorizing about the social in terms of practical/organizational factors such as material conditions, political policy, legal and administrative institutions, and/or modes of economic production. These mechanisms organize social life in patterns by opening or closing for possible human action. On the other hand, we have what could be called cognitive mechanisms; how people interpret, understand and think about the world through mechanisms such as knowledges, values, cultures and norms, factors opening up or closing possible human thought. The focal point in this thesis is discourse, and discourse is certainly in the cognitive field of sociology – structuring the thinkable. There is in reality of

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<sup>2</sup> See section 3.2.

course a complex reciprocal interplay between organization factors and cognitive factors, which is in no way reducible to this distinction.

### *1.3.2 Boundaries of the field*

I use the term *love-relationships* for the social field of this thesis. The term is chosen for being both wide and specific at the same time. It is wide because it allows an entire range of practices and feelings on a scale ranging from feelings of love in one end and practical organization of relationships on the other. This incorporate loose flings as well as decades-old marriages held together only ‘for the kids’. At the same time, the term specifies a type of relationships - *relationships constructed within a discourse of love*. This narrows the subject-matter enough for a theoretical discussion without the doomed hassle of attempting an absolute definition of love. ‘Love-relationships’ is a purposely broad and flexible term intended to include various variations of practices while retaining the discursive core as is the focal point of this thesis. It is not limited to mono- or heteronormativity, and includes verbally undefined relationships as long as they can be understood with a discourse of love.

### *1.3.3 Who is the subject?*

It is of critical importance to note that whenever I imply an unspecified subject, I discuss the younger generations of the so-called western world. I am myself a twenty-six year old Swede with an academic education, and this puts me in a certain position to interpret the social world. The reader should be aware of how this limits any statements made within this thesis.

Although empirical studies sometimes can benefit from an outside perspective, I believe that my personal experiences and position is advantageous for theory construction of a field I view from within, but this also means that my interpretations are most useful to understand the situation of similar subjects and might be less useful to other subjects. There is a multiplicity of processes shaping the ways people do love-relationships in different geographical and social areas. It is fully possible that even opposite processes is at work in other areas, and that some areas are affected differently, if at all, by the discursive developments of which I speak.

## **1.4 Disposition**

In order to achieve the stated objectives, this thesis is divided into six chapters. **Chapter one** structures the thesis by introducing the reader to the subject-matter, delimiting the extent of

the thesis and the theoretical approach, describing the purpose and objectives of the thesis and structuring the disposition of the text. **Chapter two** states the meta-theoretical premises of the thesis by briefly elaborating a theory of discourse, which forms the framework of a priori assumptions for the rest of the text.

Chapter three to five contain the theoretical body of the thesis. **Chapter three** is mainly intended to meet objective A. To do this, I first summarize key concepts of late modernity theorists Anthony Giddens, Zygmunt Bauman and Ulrich Beck & Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim. Next is a summary of how the stability of love-relationships have collapse through the socio-historical processes of modernity on both discursive and practical/organization level. The final section of the chapter conceptualizes the two major discursive regimes of discursive stability/change, synthesized from said theorists.

**Chapter four** is dedicated to objectives B and C as a detailed extension of current discursive conflict threatening the stability of love-relationships, describing contradictions in detail. The chapter analyzes some contradictions of discourse that are problematized into explicit risk-discourse expressed in popular culture, in which the problem-prone love/relationship is portrayed. I discuss how these understandings of expected risks might result in certain risk-diminishing strategies; i.e. adaptations of strategic practices to minimize risk.

While chapter three is about what has happened until now, and chapter four dissects the current discursive situation, **chapter five** focuses on the conditions that future discursive developments have to adhere to. The first section of the chapter discusses some of the predictions of the theorists of late modernity. The second section proposes how practical/organizational factors interact with discourse. In a final section, I momentarily discuss how some solutions to the discursive situation develop in response to certain conditions. Lastly **chapter six** serve as a conclusive summary and closing discussion.

The thesis is also supplemented by two appendices that serve as quick references for the reader. **Appendix 1** lists and defines some of the basic concepts and terms used in this thesis. **Appendix 2** summarizes the EuroStat statistics and the empirical studies cited in this thesis.

## Chapter 2: Theory of discourse

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This chapter is a collection of statements, inspired by the French philosopher Michel Foucault, which act as meta-theoretical framework of discursive theory for the thesis. The chapter elaborates the concept of discourse, the way I use it, its power in relation to truth and practices, and how discursive changes. These general statements about the sociological role of discourse are then used a priori in the rest of the thesis.

### 2.1 What is discourse?

The concept of discourse is a theoretical construct used to grasp how meaning-carrying practices, such as but not limited to language, constructs the world and sets the limits, rules and potentials for human thought and action. Thus, discourse structure behavior and can be crudely defined as *a specific way of understanding*.

The objects of discourses are everything that is thinkable; any phenomenon, idea, object, relation, action or subject etc. A discourse is the system of relationships between concepts; i.e. the way concepts are understood through their relation to other concepts. One cannot ever view or talk about the world from outside discourse; to be without discourse is to be without the ability to think. In order for something to be intelligible and communicable there has to be a system of representation, a system of concepts representing reality. These representational concepts and the way they relate to each other form the limits of acceptable and understandable communication/thought within various discursive fields, ultimately governed by a certain *regime of truth*, to use the vocabulary of Foucault (1980).

Common and shared discourse is a necessity for communication. I can only make myself intelligible to others by using known words (or other communicating practices). E.g.; the word “dog” is in no essential way connected to the animal it represents, but since you and I share an overlapping “dog”-concept, I can make myself understandable. The word does not have to be explained, because we share the same implicit understandings of its meaning and reality.

Discourse is the prerequisite for communication and thought; the implied knowledge that gives meaning to words and actions. This communication, and in the same way any other human thought, is consequently constrained by implicit rules; the systems of relations that we call discourse. A discourse is in that way similar to the concept of scientific paradigms, and defines what is possible to think in a given context.

## 2.2 Discourse as knowledge/power

Foucault tells us that discourse is at the same time knowledge and power (Foucault 1980). These are, in Foucault's conceptualization of discourse, two sides of the very same coin. Here, the word knowledge is useable in a much wider sense than in everyday life, covering all kinds of information (meaning) carried in discourse.

Used this way 'knowledge' can be explicit "facts" (what is Neil Armstrong famous for?), everyday knowledge (what to wear at a wedding), skills (being an amazing lover), implicit social assumptions (how to interact with a cashier), systems of values (freedom, morality, the meaning of life), explicit convictions about the world (religion, philosophy) or implicit meta-assumptions and 'regimes of truth' (the existence of an objective reality). Knowledge tell us what is possible, what exists, how things are done, how the world works and how language operates.

In discourse, 'truth' is constructed through axiomatic implications that appear given, taken for granted, common sense; things that 'everybody knows'. Discourse is therefore the site of truth and reality, in the sense that the knowledge in discourse is accepted and treated as such, and truth/reality carries immense power when people translate discursive knowledges into action.

To fully understand Foucault's use of 'power', one has to, as with knowledge, take a step back from the everyday concept (power as suppressive, power as held by a subject). In Foucault's theory, power is a purely theoretical concept used to grasp the forces inherent in knowledge (Foucault 1980). *Power is knowledge*: they are inseparable. Whatever is taken as truth is also what unavoidably directs the actions of men; what is taken as truth becomes true in its effects. Since discourse direct the possible, the desirable and the way to do things, it carries almost enormous power over decisions and actions of human beings.

Foucauldian power is neither held by men nor simply suppressive. The subject cannot hold the power of discourse but is held within discursive power himself, though discourse can certainly be mobilized as strategic resource (Foucault 1980). Although power can be suppressive, and often is, Foucault declared that discursive power is also, and maybe in a much larger sense, a productive source of creativity and pleasure. A discourse certainly limits the subject's ability to think and act, but at the same time it enables and makes thoughts and actions possible. Without discourse, we would not be able to talk or think, to transfer knowledge, build great cities, or engage in relationships of love. Regarding the question of determinism, the subject is here seen as an actor with the ability to choose, but always within a given discourse.

### 2.3 (Re)constructing discourse

Discourse is (re)created and transferred through social construction; i.e. the social (re)production of implied knowledge in everyday interactions of people, culture, texts and thoughts. Even so, discourse is not something that shapes people and the world in a single direction towards a unifying homogeneity. There is no underlying principle, and power does not come from beyond the discourse itself – it is reproduced in every relation and every interaction (Foucault 1980).

Foucault (1980) used the metaphor of war to describe the use and evolution of discourse. Conflicting discourses continuously struggle to maintain the power to define what is true, in everyday life and throughout history. Each discursive field contains various incompatible discursive contradictions, and in specific contexts, two or more discourses can often be used to understand the same phenomenon. Contradictions are not necessary problematic as long as they do not cause practical complications or difficult choices, or simply if one discourse is dominant enough to marginalize conflicting discourse of inferior power.

The contradictions that are destabilizing are the ones that cause very real problems, such as impossible situations or illegitimate social organization, and/or that create anxiety in cognitive, emotional and/or behavioral dissonance. If so, the war Foucault spoke of may become visible due to problematizations of contradictions. In this widely quoted section, Foucault explains his idea of problematization;

**Problematization doesn't mean the representation of a pre-existent object, nor the creation through discourse of an object that doesn't exist. It's the set of discursive or non-discursive practices that makes something enter into the play of the true and false, and constitutes it as an object for thought (whether under the form of moral reflection, scientific knowledge, political analysis, etc.).**

- Michel Foucault (1996:456-7)

A problematized (i.e. explicit and visible) conflict is thus a struggle of true or false. Premises are revealed and the balance of power/truth may shift. With reference to a powerful regime of truth; a larger system of axiomatic discourse that acts as a source of power, one discourse may be constructed as more true and all others as false. Remember that truth and power are the same, the 'truer' a discourse is, the more power it carries, and with the logic of truth there can be only one true discourse, at least in each separate context.

When a discursive conflict are problematized in considerable scale, some of the implicit knowledges/assumptions are made visible and appear less given, less natural and less necessary (Foucault 1972). By making assumptions visible and criticized by alternatives, they are denaturalized and lose power. This shakes the very foundation of the discourse and is a propellant mechanism of change. The changes caused by discursive conflict can have different shape, such as dismissing the less powerful (less 'true') discourse, creating some kind of new hybrid discourse, adapting the less powerful discourse or by changing practices in a way that makes them less dependent on the aspects of the discourse that are in conflict (Foucault 1972).



## Chapter 3: Late modern love

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This chapter is dedicated to what has happened in modernity's transition into its late phase, as a background and reference chapter for the rest of the thesis. The chapter is divided into three sections covering this transition in relation to love-relationships. The first section introduces key concepts of prominent social theorists of late modernity; British sociologist Anthony Giddens, Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman and the German sociologists Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim. These authors were chosen for several reasons beyond their immense influence, primarily because they have all contributed significantly to both theory of late modernity and theory of contemporary love. While the authors do not write within a theory of discourse they do supply important concepts, which are crucial to understanding processes of change, here translated where necessary to fit within the theory of discourse presented in chapter 2.

Section 3.2 is a summary of how the relative stability of love-relationships in modernity has been threatened by the transition to late modernity. The institutional changes of the transition are summarized in a table of centrifugal and centripetal mechanisms. The final section of this chapter elaborates two contemporary discursive regimes at conflict, causing contradictions that put the construction and practice of love-relationships under tension. The two discourses are based on Giddens romantic love (adapted to incorporate the fusing/pure relationship) and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim's individualization (put in terms of an ethic that drive the mechanisms of individualization, and extended with Bauman's concept of consumerist happiness). Understanding these discursive regimes at war is fundamental to understanding developments in the field.

### 3.1 Key concepts in theories of late modern love

#### 3.1.1 *The transformation of the romantic ideal*

In *The transformation of intimacy* Anthony Giddens (1995) describes the development of the discursive ideal which he calls *romantic love*. During the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the ideal of romantic love developed together and in interaction with several other institutions such as a discourse of non-reproductive sexuality.

Romantic love operated in reciprocity with institutions of marriage and gender binary, supporting each other's discursive power (Giddens 1995). The ideal of romantic love forms the basis for monogamous constructions of love, where twosomes are the only

thinkable/acceptable way of loving. Essential to this discourse is the idea that the other can complete the self and one's own life, which is fundamentally lacking without the other. This is a heteronormative component of romantic love; the other is expected to be (fundamentally) different from oneself and thus able to complete a unity. This draws upon and reinforces the discourse of essentialistic binarity of gender – of gender as opposites, exclusive and mutually completing<sup>3</sup>. In addition to this, the object of love is understood as someone unique and special, someone who is a 'soul mate', a 'true love', or 'the one'. Another central component of ideal of romantic love is the idea of true love as something potentially eternal, lasting through and against anything.

Giddens (1995) argue that in late modernity two new ideals of love, called the *pure relationship* and *fusing love*, has developed in contrast to some of the ideals of romantic love. The discourse of the pure relationship asserts that a relationship can, and maybe even ideally should, exist with no external purpose or ties. The pure relationship exists for itself and can be ended at any time without reference to anything external. Love becomes a project for the autonomous subject, no longer necessarily governed by external structure. Fusing love an ideal of equality, self-exposure, emotional exchange and vulnerability. The fusing/pure relationship lack external support from institutions, such as the marriage and the family, and is therefore an instable and insecure practice relying heavily on emotional intimacy and invested commitment.

Note that Anthony Giddens (1995) use his concepts (romantic love and the fusing/pure relationship) as ideals. In translating these concepts to discourse, I instead use them as both a normative ethic of love (*how things ought to be*) and as constituting the normal reality of love (*how things are*).

Within a discursive framework, these ideals of love do not necessarily conflict and can be used together as a hybrid discourse. Giddens' (1995) ideals should here be viewed as two sets of discourse within the same discursive regime, both contradicting and complementing each other. From here on, I call this entire discursive regime a *discourse of romantic love*<sup>4</sup>, since constitutional core elements, such as monogamy and the construct of love itself, also remains in a discourse of pure/fusing relationships. Giddens transformation should here be viewed as continuous and overlapping discursive developments, rather than a sudden clean break with two separate and fundamentally different constructs of love-relationships.

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<sup>3</sup> As in the proverb 'opposites attract'; attraction as constituted by difference.

<sup>4</sup> See section 3.4.1 for further details.

### 3.1.2 *The mechanism of reflexivity*

A core concept in Giddens theory of modernity is *reflexivity*; the human ability to consciously reflect on something from an outside perspective, to problematize and criticize what is otherwise taken for granted (Giddens 1990). Giddens argues that reflexivity is institutionalized in modernity, and that it is increasing with factors such as increasing globalization and mass media. Reflexivity accelerates processes of discursive change by allowing new ways of thinking through creative critique of previous understandings. Reflexivity makes discrepancies and contradictions of discourse and practice visible through problematization, and in late modernity, the turn has come to the discourse of romantic love. In late modern life self has become a project of reflexively choosing and shaping oneself through lifestyle practices such as sexuality and love.

### 3.1.3 *The liquidification process*

The process Bauman calls *liquidification* is used as an encompassing term for the process of breaking down previously solid social structure (Bauman 2000). Note that this term describes the entire process, while Giddens' reflexivity refers to a central mechanism of liquidification. The process of examining and eroding existing social structure once meant that the old, the traditional, was disassembled in the name of rationality in order to be replaced with new, modern structures. Bauman argues that in the times of late modernity, previous solid social structure is liquefied without much new replacement.

### 3.1.4 *Individualization processes*

Various processes of *individualization* have always existed but are characteristic of modernity and especially of late modernity (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002). In short, individualization is *the process of increasing institutionalized individualism*<sup>5</sup>. Institutions of late modernity (discourse and practices of social organization) expect and reproduce isolated autonomous individuals. For the first time in history, the individual is the basic social unit, the reference point of political policy, economic production and moral discourse. People are expected to plan, understand and construct themselves as individuals and main characters in reflexive self-biographies

Individualization processes are a part of modern liquidification as they dissolve social structures in the name of the individual's freedom. Individualization forces reflexive and

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<sup>5</sup> Not to be confused with the explicit ideology of individualism.

accountable choice where external structure once was. The individual is centered, and the influence of tradition and convention over lifestyles and behavior is deconstructed. This does in no way mean that people are actually free to choose, but that their choices are *discursively understood* as their own, with nothing external attributed as a source of causation (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002).

### 3.1.5 A consumerist discourse of happiness

The consumerist discourse of happiness has according to Bauman (2003) become the general model for happiness and satisfaction in late modernity, a model which is inherently individualized. The consumerist discourse promotes and assumes internal reference and utilizes individualized ethics to justify putting your own satisfaction first and foremost. With a ruthless emphasis on immediate desires, *what you really want and know you need*, the expected satisfaction anything, even love, is constantly weighed against its costs. A large and constantly updated market of alternatives is always available, and if the 'goods' isn't completely satisfactory, or in some way faulty, it may always be returned and replaced at any time<sup>6</sup>.

### 3.1.6 Risk

Though the risk concept was first developed for macro theory of societal structure (Beck, 1998), it is also used by Beck & Beck-Gernsheim in relation to how people reflexively approach love-relationships (1995; 2002). Risk play an essential role in late modernity, and the concept is in this context translated into *risk-discourses*. Discourses of risk are problematizations of the contradictions and conflicts of discursive regimes, and the concept is a useful key in explain how discursive expectations exercise power over practice through reflexivity.

Risk necessarily implies uncertainty (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Risks are not costs, but an expected cost that *might* occur. Thus risk awareness and exposure invite anxiety. The opposition between risk and opportunity is an important aspect of the risk concept in relation to agency and reflexivity. Choices are opened up and forced by individualization and liquidification; in the lack of external structure and within a discourse of internally referring morality, one has to choose paths which previously were pre-determined. Choosing between possible opportunities is now necessary to move one's life-biography forward, rather than simply following a given linear trajectory. This individualizes responsibility, and one has to

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<sup>6</sup> Hence the practice of serial monogamy.

estimate the risks that come with the decision. A new kind of awareness, accompanied by pragmatic calculation of risk/opportunity, is now an integral feature of late modern life.

### **3.2 Stability and change**

In social organization a multitude of factors facilitate stability and/or change. Though change inevitably happens over time, relative long term stability is often achieved through several interacting mechanisms supporting each other. Relationships were once held together by numerous intertwined institutions. Now, several of the practical/organizational mechanisms, such as female economic dependency, have lost their ability to determine what is possible and what is not, to a large extent through processes of individualization (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002) and liquidification (Bauman 2000). These overlapping processes restructure social organization in the name of individual freedom by removal of restraints of choice and introduction of mechanisms to induce further possible choice (e.g. the welfare state).

#### *3.2.1 Modernity and the family unit*

In early modernity, from the eighteenth century until roughly 1960, relationships were held together by several centripetal institutions that remained stable and changed only at slow pace. The family was considered the basic social and economic unit during the modern era, although the practice of families changed from large households of kinship to the so-called core family (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995). In either formation, the family and economic interdependence were inseparable and for most people unavoidable (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Giddens 1995). This was reinforced by institutions such as the marriage, romantic love and binary gender roles. The gender roles meant that man and woman were highly dependent on each other for (re)production of various economic and social necessities due to their polarized abilities to serve different purposes.

The fact that the institution of marriage was *'until death do you part'*, and that it was economic suicide for most women to claim independence<sup>7</sup>, coupled with early marriage, meant that people spent very large portions of their lives together. This resulted in shared experience, and thus in shared values, as well as in a common biography of the household (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Giddens 1995). The low social mobility and smaller communities of the time reinforced this centripetal effect. People married people with a similar economic, cultural, religious and personal background. The local community supplied

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<sup>7</sup> And to a lesser degree social suicide for men.

a limited amount of alternative options and served as a panopticon of centrifugal social control.

### *3.2.2 Individualization in late modernity*

In late modernity, since roughly 1960, most centripetal mechanisms were liquefied, or at least eroded to a shadow of their former power. Of course, the family still remains a rather powerful institution, although more and more people now chose to live alone or to organize their household outside of the model of the ‘core family’ (European Communities & Eurostat 2007). The practice of marriage remains as well, but rates are falling while divorce rates are rising (European Union & Eurostat 2011), and young people reject marriage (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Hughes 2005). Although a discourse of gender binarity certainly remains strong and powerful, though battered by reflexive problematization, economic dependence have been largely reduced due to individualized political policy, the welfare state, and the possibility of non-heteronormative lifestyles (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Giddens 1995).

But even without all these centripetal institutions, people still attempt to form relationships of love (see Bawin-Legros 2004). All the theorists mentioned in this chapter agree that people, although anxious and ambivalent, seek emotional commitment, intimacy, connectedness and the ever prevailing ideal of love as the deliverance from loneliness and emotional and existential voids (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Giddens 1995; Bauman 2003). What remains the main centripetal mechanism of the somewhat pure relationships of late modernity is the discourse of love-relationships itself. This discourse is now the core reason to long for, build and hold together love-relationships.

The centrifugal factors of our times are on the other hand abundant, creating pressure and strain on attempts to establish and retain relationships of love. Late modern individualization has led to fully individualized self-biographies for the first time in history (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002), and liquidification of social structure, in the name of freedom and through reflexivity, has led to an abundance of necessary choice. Your life is now primarily a life of your own and for yourself, with your own satisfaction and happiness the only reference point in the lack of external institutions telling you what to do. You have to choose, and whatever you put up with is your self-chosen burden. It is now more likely that it is the fear of being alone that holds people together than material factors (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Bauman 2003). Dissatisfaction and quarrel spawn in the face of new options, such as taking a different job elsewhere, dividing house hold chores differently or simply loving someone else.

	Modernity	Late Modernity
Centripetal mechanisms	Shared experience/values Discourse of romantic love The family/The household The marriage Small local communities Economic dependence Gender binarity and roles Limited/constrained sexuality	Discourse of romantic love  (in part marriage/family, economic preference and heterosexual gender relations)
Centrifugal mechanisms		Individualization & reflexive choice Consumerist discourse of happiness Discourses of risk Individualized experience/values Social/economic welfare Available alternatives Social mobility and urbanization Contraceptives & non-reproductive sex

Table 1: Mechanisms of stability in modernity and change in late modernity.

### 3.3 Critique of the sociology of intimacy

This section briefly covers critique of the limitations of the statements the covered theories of late modernity. These grand narratives are critiqued both for their limitations in coverage as simplified sweeping abstractions of reality, and for the limited premises of their theoretical scope.

#### 3.3.1 Nuances and localities

Because of the indirect relationship between macro processes – discourse – micro practices/realities it is necessary to state how different groups and localities within western modernity are affected in different ways by the same processes. Discourse is context dependent, and can be mobilized strategically in different ways with different consequences depending on local power relations. The theoretical idea of the ability to freely choose one's lifestyle might very well be reserved for a minority in some discursive and local contexts. For example, being openly gay in a middle class area of central London might be very different from attempting the same in the outskirts of St. Petersburg, with its recently adopted repressing laws and the conservative discourse supporting them.

This has led to significant critique of the authors of theory of late modernity, with emphasis on both of how the idea of choice and self-construction are in practice often overstated while very real constraints are played down (Budgeon & Roseneil 2004b). Budgeon & Roseneil

suggests that the situation of late modernity is perhaps better understood as neither fully chosen or fully constrained. While theory is always simplifications of reality, exaggerating the significant, this is an important point that cannot be overstated.

Note, though, that Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (1995) does not claim free choice or a complete lack of external forces. There is no such thing as a free choice, and choices are most often less free than we think. The application of a discursive perspective useful to avoid a common misinterpretation of Beck & Beck-Gernsheim; the authors claim that choices are discursively understood as free and internally referring, even though reality might entirely different. Conclusively one should be wary of how local realities and use of discourse produce specific situations that might differ from the statements of grand narrative theories. One should also treat the idea of late modern freedom as primarily discursive; although social organizations are being liquefied there are still constraints, and in reality lifestyles are neither completely chosen nor constrained.

### 3.3.2 *Intimacies beyond love*

In *The transformation of intimacy* (1995), Anthony Giddens reserves the concept of intimacy to love and family, just as Beck & Gernsheim in most of *The normal chaos of love* (1995). This largely ignores and negates other types of intimacy. Budgeon and Roseneil (2004b) argue that intimacy and care now to a large extent happen beyond the family, beyond dyadic relationships and even beyond a discourse of love. Thus the sociology of late modern intimacy is blinded by the intimacy-constituting discourse of love-relationships. Budgeon and Roseneil argue that the sociology of 21<sup>st</sup> century intimacy have to let go of the heteronormative family and include a pluralism of sexualities, gender relations, primary sources of intimacy from other types of relationships than the couple (such as friendship), and the wide range of practices organizing intimate relationships (such as cohabiting friends, non-monogamies, and relationships of ‘living together apart’).

I do of course make myself guilty of this limitation, although with the explicit intention of dissecting the discourse on love. While the practice of love-relationships remain prevalent, and without signs of dissolution, it is but one type of intimacy, and by no means the only one. The discourse and practice of love-relationships are at times rivaled and outmaneuvered by other discourse/practice, such as friendship<sup>8</sup> (Roseneil & Budgeon 2004a) or relationship anarchy (Strandell 2011).

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<sup>8</sup> See chapter 5.



### 3.4 Major discursive powers of the field

I have argued, with the support of the theorists of late modernity, that the major remaining source of stability in the practice of love-relationships is now the discourse of love itself. This discursive regime is now under strong pressure for adaption and largely lacks external support from other institutions. While a discourse certainly can remain stable itself if it is not subject to major conflict, the regime of romantic love is largely incompatible with the more powerful ethical regime of individualized freedom. There is an inherent contradiction between freedom of bonds and commitment to, and investment in, intimacy (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Bauman 2003). This section describes these theoretical constructs at war, while the next chapter dissects some of their contradictions in detail.

#### 3.4.1 *The late modern discursive regime of romantic love*

The term ‘romantic’ exclude other discourses of love, such as the love between parent and child, or the love one feels for a pet, a hobby, an object or a place. The discourse of romantic love tells us what love is; it constitutes the very core of love and carries implications for the way we understand situations, relationships and feelings. Note how fundamental discourse is: by constructing intelligible objects of love and situations in which love can exist, *the discourse precedes feelings and thoughts of love* due to its defining nature. This discursive regime and its sub-discourses define the truths and realities of love-relationships, and their related behaviors, subject positions, categories, norms and situations.

Some, such as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) would claim that love, now isolated from external motivation, have become more important than ever and reached somewhat of a worshiped/religious status – a hope of salvation. Others disagree with this, however, such as Roseneil and Budgeon (2004a), who suggest that friendship sometimes is a prioritized source of intimacy and care.

Essential to discourse on romantic love was once the core aspect of two individuals completing each other, thus forming a common unified biography, a complete life together (Giddens 1995). This aspect does in part remain but has relatively frictionless moved towards the fusing love of two individuals with separate biographies forming an ‘us’ consisting of two ‘me’s’ with their own separate lives and experiences (See Eldén 2009).

Another previously essential component of romantic love, related to the discourse of marriage, was the notion of ‘forever’ (Giddens 1995). This is an interesting aspect as it still exists side by side with the discourse of serial monogamy. In the Belgian statistics of Bawin-Legros (2004), half of the respondents had answered that the normative model of love is

forever, and the other half answered that serial monogamy is. Although people generally recognize that serial monogamy is commonly practiced by most, the romantic ideal of 'forever' lives on as a mythological ideal, and the same person can mobilize either discourse in separate contexts. This contradiction does not necessarily pressure immediate change since it does not cause any direct conflict if the discourses are used separately.

A component that has largely changed is the heteronormative aspect that once was fundamental to romantic love (Giddens 1995). This move away from two fundamentally different subjects completing each other and towards the fusion of two individuals of any kind is at least in part an effect of the struggle for the equality of gender and sexualities. E.g. a woman no longer has to desire the masculine for her feelings to be intelligible as 'real love'.

Three core components do however remain fundamentally intact in late modernity. One of them is the institution of monogamy; of love as a finite resource that cannot be divided or spread between individuals without losing quality or quantity. The discourse of monogamy have thus far escaped major problematization, even though it is the cause several conflicts. See for example the study by Anderson (2010) of how cheating college students deal with contradictions and anxiety in order to preserve monogamy at all costs, without ever questioning its validity.

Another component that is very much intact is the construct of love itself. The discourse of love itself is a discourse of essentialism. Love is understood as something which can exist without context and coming from within people, from an authentic and true core of the self. This constructs love as something that has existed in the same way as a part of the human experience in all times, simply masked by culture. 'Real love' is constructed as condition-less, it appears by itself when someone special is met, and is supposed to be self-sustaining without the need of support. Failing this, the love is questioned as a compromise, or as conditional, in a shallow or fabricated sense. This relates to the final component of romantic love that has endured other changes; the notion of specialness. Love is condition-less because of the other person's supposed uniqueness, as being '*the one*', or at least as good as it possibly gets. If one is not special enough, the purity of the love is questioned. This intertwines with the discourse of monogamy, since monogamy is all about picking out and choosing that one very special person as the target of the true love that can only be directed at a single individual amongst all available. The subject position as partner is thus entirely exclusive; ontologically separated from other relations, and allowing unique privileges and responsibilities.

### 3.4.2 *The discursive ethics of individualized freedom*

The discourse of individualized freedom is an ethical regime that governs, directs and limits a large amount of institutions in late modernity. It has gained almost incomparable power and interacts with extremely influential processes such as individualization and liquidification, mechanisms such as the reflexive choice, emancipatory movements, politics and revolutions, and the discourses of consumerism, the free will and the individual.

Together with ideas such as rationality, scientific empiricism and the faith in man's ability to conquer nature, the idea of the individual and the search for freedom are core characteristics of modernity. This does not, however, imply a linear historical development, even though freedom has remained as an empty abstract value throughout modernity. The content of the value 'freedom' has changed as well as the individual's relationship to freedom, and both these ideas have at times been set aside by other values, such as nationalism.

Modern freedom was at first freedom from the traditional authority, which became illegitimate with modernity. Freedom was primarily about freedom from oppression, from unjustifiable constraints at the will of traditional power, resulting in the overthrowing of despotic monarchies and the institution of the impersonal constitutive nation-states. Next in line the modern struggle for freedom became more concerned with a freedom from material constraints, and socialist ideologies, trade unions and the welfare state were born.

In the late phase of modernity freedom has turned towards the discursive aspect of social constraints. The modern struggle is now in search for the absolute the individual; a freedom from all social structure such as heteronormative gender/sexuality, ethnicity, culture, and not the least institutions such as marriage, the family, and now perhaps even freedom from the constraints of romantic love its practices. Roseneil (2000) use the term queer tendencies for this specific type of liquidification of normative discourse, arguing that in late modernity the normative itself is under assault through problematizations; provoking and transcending categories and assumptions.

I use the term *individualized* freedom to capture how freedom is now inherently tied to the construct of the individual. This construct and the ethic of individualized freedom are intertwined with processes of individualization. The discursive ethic of individualized freedom motivates and justifies individualization and is at the same time (re)constructed through the individualized organization of society.

Not until late modernity has freedom become this highly connected with the individual, through individualization, and gained the moral high ground, reaching previously unseen discursive power. Within the discourse of individualized freedom, internal reference is

ultimately the only acceptable and legitimate moral compass, and anything that prevents an individual from choosing in absolute freedom (whatever that is) is to be crushed by reflexivity.

Within this ethical discourse, one has a duty to oneself; an obligation to stay true to oneself, to never do what one does not want to do (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995). In the overflow of options and possibilities opened up, you are not only the judge of what is justifiable but also responsible for the choices you make, however impossible, difficult or contradictory. In this, you are creating yourself through your choices; you pick your lifestyle and thus your identity. You create your own biography.

## Chapter 4: Contradictions and conflicts

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Contradictions within the field of love-relationships cause significant dissonance between the two powerful discursive regimes of romantic love and individualized freedom. In this chapter, I map the contemporary state of these contradictions and conflicts in terms of risk-discourses. Risk-discourses are explicit ways of understanding and expecting certain emotional or practical conflicts of discursive contradictions. Discourses of risk therefore problematize the romantic relationship, love and/or associated behavior, on the basis of expected risk.

These manifest problematizations of discursive conflict are used as everyday knowledge of how love/relationships ‘actually’ are, that serve as cognitive information for reflexive risk calculation. As Foucault put it; what is assumed and treated as reality gets very real consequences (Foucault 1980). In this way, discourses of risk have direct power as the ‘realities’ of people’s thoughts and actions.

### **4.1 Popular culture as discursive text**

Popular culture is cultural expressions intended to be easily understood and relatable by almost everyone, and must therefore operate within widespread prevailing discourse. This makes popular culture an excellent indicator of dominant, normalized discourse, and commonly intelligible problematizations of discursive conflicts. Popular culture is produced for the purpose of being directly intelligible by entire societies.

It is, however, important to note that the narratives of popular culture are not necessarily intended to be accounts of realities, of ‘how things really are’. The audience does of course not accept all popular cultures as realistic representations of reality, but whether the expression is intended as social realism or cinematic dramatization is not a concern here. No matter the intention of the creators, popular culture (re)constructs ways of thinking about phenomenon such as love and relationships that are understandable and relatable to people in general. The point is not in the specific story being told, but the implicit prerequisite knowledge necessary to make the story intelligible.

Note that this is not a discourse analysis in the sense of constructing a theoretical understanding based on empirical observations. This thesis is a purely theoretical text and the following case studies are not being treated as empirical in the sense of stringent scientific observation and analysis, but as illustrative empirical examples to theoretical statements. They are intended to clarify, explain and act as rhetoric support by tying abstract statements to

concrete examples of expressed discourse. With this intention, the cases were strategically chosen, and treated as objects of informal analysis.

#### **4.2 The risks of love**

Love has become a risky project in late modernity. Risk calculation is institutionalized and enforced by processes of individualization, and reflexivity. Committing to a late modern love-relationship means uncertainty, to take risks by investing emotions and exposing vulnerabilities without any institutionalized guarantees (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Giddens 1995; Bauman 2003). In order to commit to intimacy, you have to give a part of yourself to another internally referring individual, who constantly have to re-choose you for the investment to keep its value. You expose yourself to someone who will give no guarantees beyond words; someone who's only moral guide is his or her own (dis)satisfaction, forever weighing alternatives of 'greener grass' against you.

This situation of chronic uncertainty is what Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002) has called a normalization of fragility in relationships. In terms of discourse, this normalized fragility is constituted by the a priori expectation that relationships are inherently risky and that conflicts are a normal, perhaps even natural, aspect of relationships.

It is not that discourses of risk have not existed before, or been portrayed in popular culture. The important point here is the *normalization* of these discourses, and the associated anxiety that comes with the discursively institutionalized *expectations*. When discourse moves from 'could happen, but probably not to me' to 'ought to happen because there is no rationally believable alternative', things change. If risks are expected because of an understanding of love-relationships as unavoidably uncertain, people have to adapt their behavior to account for potential risks.

The most obvious risks to calculate might be the risks that you take yourself when committing yourself to and investing in a partner, such as the risks of binding yourself to the wrong person. The risks you take are also risks centered on the choices your partner might make, as well as the feelings, thoughts or behaviors your partner might engage in. There are also risk-discourses centered on the couple itself; by engaging in a relationship you expose the feelings of love to certain risks, which might end with pain and suffering. The continuous re-choosing of a relationship may therefore, at all times, involve multiple anxieties and ambivalences from several overlapping sources of risk.

### 4.3 Risk centered on the self

Some risk-discourses are knowledges of what happens when one invests oneself into a relationship. These discourses consist of various context-dependent components, and while some risks are understood as an almost unavoidable reality, others are thought of as but potential risks, or even risks that may or may not ‘really’ exist. I will focus mainly on discourses that are taken for granted, as reality, *how things really are* and what *everyone really knows*, since they carry the most extensive reality-constituting power/truth.

The principal key in this type of risk-discourse is the limitation of the self; the proposition that engaging in relationship practices of romantic love will lead to reduced autonomy and dissatisfaction. This is a contradiction between the discursive regime of romantic love, which expects people to commit to and invest in certain prescribed practices if ‘really in love’, and the ethics of individualized freedom which advocates your own freedom and satisfaction. The later regime demands that you are able to legitimize your choices with internal reference. If you chose to limit yourself and expose yourself to dissatisfaction for someone else something is wrong; you are on the losing side and you are acting immoral towards yourself. By contradicting the regime of individualized love, you are unavoidably stressed by the anxiety of the dissonance between the commandments of the two contradictory discourses.

How this conflict plays out and how it is understood depend on certain contextual details of practice. For example, even engaging in a non-cohabiting relationship means certain limitations, and investments such as not seeking out other partners, not having sex with others or making unacceptable prioritizations. On the other hand commitment to cohabitation, marriage and/or family means a whole lot more, and in some ways different, limitations to self-realization and exposure to dissatisfaction. A significant part of this anxiety comes from the enforced choice and lack of structure; it is you who limit yourself, no one and nothing else command you. Whatever you are missing out on, you brought it on yourself.

#### 4.3.1 Risks of the self in popular culture

In *Vicky Christina Barcelona* by Woody Allen (2008), the two main characters, visiting Barcelona for the summer, stay with an older married couple. The wife of this marriage feels trapped and that their passion has been lost with time, stating to Vicky that “*I love him, but I am not in love with him*” (Allen 2008). This reflects back on Vicky’s own situation, having been seduced by and made love to a bohemian Spaniard named Juan Antonio while at the same time engaged to her fiancé Doug back in America. Doug is represented as the boring but safe type, with a successful career, who prefers to conform to norms and rejects any deviance.

He rejects anything that is not normative, such as the poly relationship of Christina, Juan Antonio and his ex-wife, and appears dull and grey. Vicky, on the other hand, is intrigued by the possibility of poly relationships and cannot stop thinking of her night with Juan Antonio, fearing that she also is entering the trap of unhappy marriage without passion. Eventually, the movie ends and Vicky leaves Barcelona, married to Doug, with the viewer feeling that everything went 'back to normal' in America.

*Vicky Christina Barcelona* (Allen 2008) is about many types of relationships and expresses associated conflicts, risks and critique. One of these risks is the risk of committing to a relationship with the wrong person, as in Vicky's case with Doug, for whom she feels no passion. The anxiety of this risk-discourse is the fear of entering settling for less and of getting trapped. Settling for less does not sit well with either romantic discourse of specialness or with discourse of consumerist happiness. Vicky is not and will not be fully satisfied with Doug, and she will always long for the passion she felt with Juan Antonio, forever questioning the relationships with Doug and seeing greener grass on the other side of the fence.

The risk of getting trapped in something less than ideal is also portrayed in the movie *Blue Valentine* from 2010 (Cianfrance). If *Vicky Christina Barcelona* is more of a narrative, a dramatized story, *Blue valentine* is a movie of social realism, a story intended to be understood 'as everyone knows things really are'. This does not mean that *Vicky Christina Barcelona* is not expressions of normative discourse. The general discourse on love-relationships has to be fully relatable and understandable by the viewer, even though the specific story is understood as extraordinary events that might not be expected to happen to most people (i.e. understood with a discourse of cinematic dramatization).

#### 4.3.2 *The trap of dissatisfaction*

*Blue Valentine* (Cianfrance 2010) is on the other hand a love story is depicted in a naturalized way without romantic dramatization. During the movie, the everyday relationship of Dean and Cindy are presented side by side with flashbacks to the time when the couple once met, depicting their early passionate romance. The flashbacks, set a few years ago, show a typical forming of a romantic relationship, with two young adults falling in deep, passionate love. Neither of them expects or plans to marry or start a family, but when Cindy understands that she is pregnant with her former lover's child, the couple decides to have the child, marry and start a family. Since then, all passion appears to have been lost in time, and they both appear to have lost the spark of life, living a life without much meaning or enjoyment left.



The couple keeps fighting fights that are impossible to solve, in a conflict of two wills seeking satisfaction while combining two different sets of biographies/values/personalities. They both want something else than the current and they both feel trapped and unsatisfied, unable to reach satisfaction in life together. This is a story of how commitment to a relationship can trap the self, understood through the discursive expectations that this can happen in any normal relationship. Dean and Cindy are not deviating individuals and they do not practice a deviating relationship; they are '*just as people are*'.

In order to understand this movie as social realism one has to understand relationships as something that might trap anyone, no matter how wonderfully romantic the love is at first. This point is important because in comparison with *Vicky Christina Barcelona*, where Vicky chose Doug even though she felt no passion for him (but wanted other qualities, such as safety), *Blue Valentine* depicts a happy, passionate, relationship that still eventually end up in tears, with both individuals preventing each other's life satisfaction. The risk of this trap is understood as something that could, even probably will, happen to anyone, no matter how much you and your partner love each other and no matter how perfect of a match you are. This isn't something that happens to someone who is doing something wrong, it is something that might happen to anyone, even with the best possibilities to start out with.

#### 4.3.3 *The oppression of commitments*

The expected risk that makes *Blue Valentine* (Cianfrance 2010) intelligible is thus that any relationship with anyone potentially, or even likely, becomes a trap if one invests too much. No commitment is ever safe. Even if this just understood as something that *might* happen, the possibility is enough to fuel anxiety and reflexive (re)calculation before engaging in further commitment. This sales text of the dating site *Victoria Milan* is a prime example of the strategic mobilization of this risk-discourse for marketing purposes:

**Do you feel trapped in a monotone and loveless marriage? Do you miss that magic feeling of passion? Excitement? Intimacy? Victoria Milan can make you feel alive again! Remember that you only live once...**

Victoria Milan, my translation

The expected risk of getting trapped is implied in the text, and it is also a prerequisite for producing and understanding the text. The sales text is only meaningful within a context of consumers who can understand this risk-discourse. Note how the text is about a risk centered

on the self<sup>9</sup>; it is speaking to a subject who is supposedly limited by a relationship, employing discourse of internal reference and consumerist happiness to motivate the potential consumer. YOU are trapped and YOU are missing all opportunities of YOUR own happiness, effectively missing out on the potentials of your one and only life.

This self-centered discourse is very similar to the moral discourse of marriage and cohabitation expressed in popular therapy. The discourse in self-help literature is often highly individualized, and while the concept of ‘us’ is common, the discourse nonetheless assumes two separate selves with separate wills and biographies (Eldén, 2009). Popular therapy expects certain risks of two separate self’s in conflict as almost unavoidable in any love-relationship.

In books such as the controversial *HAPPY, HAPPY* (Sveland & Wennstam 2011), an anthology of self-biographies of famous divorced women, the ethics of individualized freedom are axiomatic and left completely un-problematized. *HAPPY, HAPPY* sparked much debate due to its explicit attempt to reframe divorce in positive terms supported by discourse of freedom, rationality and self-realization. The authors state that, contrary to negative associations of divorce, “*In reality divorce could be what rescues you back to life.*” (Sveland & Wennstam 2011:8). What make this book and its discursive problematization of divorce possible and morally legitimate enough to be published, and spark widespread debate due to its conflict with other moral discourse, is the mobilization of the ethics of individualized freedom. If marriage is a potential prison to the freedom and realization of the self, and a satisfactory life, it is ultimately impossible to justify within this ethic. The value of the freedom of the individual, guided by internal reference, is here irreducible. You cannot let an institution (any institution) stand in the way of your one and only life, something expressed reflexively in the first chapter: “*It is my own life that passes by. My own. Second by second it becomes entire years that pass by due to this. Moments and eternities which I can never get back.*” (Glaser, in Sveland & Wennstam 2011:18, my translation).

#### **4.4 Risk centered on the other**

Risk-discourses of the other in love-relationships are normalized expectations of potential behaviors and/or feelings made possible by the lack of institutions limiting the autonomous individual. These normalized expectations are often highly dependent on problematizations of

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<sup>9</sup> Although the text certainly implies the risk of partners cheating on each other as well.

romantic love, frequently expressed as a discourse of how people *actually* work, in ‘reality’, outside of the weakening morals of romantic love.

#### 4.4.1 *The morality of the free will*

If people are expected to ultimately act in the interest of their own satisfaction, with a responsibility to do whatever they want without limiting themselves by social expectations, several aspects of romantic love are exposed to potential risk. It is not that moral commandments such as sexual monogamy are powerless, for they are still powerful and influential. Therefore, in order to solve, or rather avoid, the dissonance between contradictory discursive commandments, people structure practices and cognitions in ways that allows both moralities to operate side by side without direct confrontation (e.g. ‘I will be faithful *because I want to*’).

These strategies reduce tension and anxiety, and will at least on the surface allow romantic love to exercise its remaining power as constitutional of relationship practices. But when hard-pressed between the will to be faithful, for example, and another strong(er) will, such as the pull of an attractive alternative sexual partner, it is significantly difficult to legitimize the self-limitation in not taking an opportunity. What except yourself is preventing you from getting what you want, if no one will ever find out about it? As long as no one finds out, it is still possible to operate within both moral discourses (Anderson 2010). If situations of conflicts like these are understood as normal, and thus to be expected, anxiety follows. A nagging itch that is impossible to put to sleep without keeping a constant 24/7 watchful eye over your partner’s every move.

#### 4.4.2 *Falling short*

The risk of the other’s will and wants in situations without externally enforced limitations is not simply limited to cheating/infidelity. An expectation implied in serial monogamy is that people eventually change, lose interest, or simply finds someone else whom they prefer. This means that in order to sustain a relationship and associated investment, the others satisfaction must be held high at all times and in all important areas. If it is not high enough, there is the constant risk of not being re-chosen, of being compared with someone else and falling short. Within a consumerist discourse of happiness, coupled with the romantic ideal of being that one special person, one must be a complete satisfaction (and the very best one) in order to not be at risk of being rejected as soon as a better deal comes by.

The discourse of serial monogamy depends on this expected risk; everyone will eventually be exchanged at some point – it is not a question of *if* but of *when*. Note that this effect is

entirely dependent on the continuous dominance of monogamy as constitutional of love-relationships. Since you can only love and be together with one person at the time, the old partner will have to be completely replaced if a new, better, alternative is found.

In the hit song *Call your girlfriend* by Robyn (2010), the risk implied in serial monogamy is a necessary prerequisite knowledge to understand the lyrics of the song. The song placed number one on the *Billboards Hot Dance Club Songs* chart and can be said to be a prime example of international popular culture, supposedly intelligible and relatable by almost everyone in the contemporary west. The song is sung from the perspective of a girl who asks another person to leave his/her girlfriend in order to be with the singing subject instead. The following lines quote several sections of the song:

**Call your girlfriend  
It's time you had the talk  
Give your reasons  
Say it's not her fault  
But you just met somebody new  
Tell her not to get upset, second-guessing  
everything you've said and done  
And when she gets upset, tell her how  
you never meant to hurt no-one  
Don't you tell her how I give you something  
that you never even knew you missed  
Don't you even try and explain how it's so  
different when we kiss**

Robyn – *Call your girlfriend* (2010)

These lyrics presumes a monogamous institution and that the object of such love-relationships can simply be exchanged when someone better comes along. The last four quoted lines clearly state that the singer is more satisfying than the previous partner. It is also implied that one may have needs and wants that are unknown even to one self, which may be discovered at any time when the right person to satisfy them are encountered. The song does not explicitly state that interpellated subject has been sexually cheating, but at least kissing has occurred with the singing subject while still within a monogamous relationship. It does, however, imply that the previous girlfriend is likely to get upset, sad or angry by the suggested break-up. In summary; these things do happen and expected to, but are at the same time expected to be painful for the rejected partner nevertheless.

An interesting feature with the song is that it is sung from the position of the person causing the impending break-up, and that this person is portrayed as compassionate. Since popular culture demands that the subject positioned as narrator are somehow relatable, and since the singer both narrates from this position and portrays it as a position possible even for good, moral, empathic subjects, it is a narration of a situation that just about anyone supposedly can find themselves in. Love is constructed in this song, but it demands the suffering of the previous object of love, the previous girlfriend, and the singer is anxious of this but still demands that the exchange of serial monogamy takes place with the understanding of love as uncontrollable.

#### 4.4.3 Normalized sympathetic cheating

While the song by Robyn is referring to the discourse of serial monogamy (as risky), a related and frequently used theme in popular culture is the discourse of the common and sympathetic cheating/infidelity. This discourse of risk constructs cheating as common and normal, something that just about anyone might do, which might be empathically relatable in some circumstances. Cheating can even be ethical with reference to the moral discourse individualized freedom.

In *Vicky Christina Barcelona* (Allen 2008) one of the protagonists, Vicky, cheats on her fiancé but remains a sympathetic main character whose actions and feelings are relatable and morally defensible to the viewer. In the continuously produced and immensely popular international TV-series *Mad Men* (AMC 2007), the main character and protagonist Donald Draper is portrayed as a frequent cheater. So are almost of the all other men and some of the women in the series, thus constructing (even) the 60's as a time when cheating was very common. Although Draper may certainly be viewed as immoral at times, he is still a relatable, understandable and even loved character – not a deviating antagonist rejected by the audience.

The previously cited sales text by dating-site Victoria Milan (see page 26) is another interesting example of cheating as normalized and at least partially justifiable. Though dating-sites has been around for quite some time, and cheating certainly has, this type of explicit service, advertising openly without attempts to cover and legitimize its purpose, is something new. Swedish dating site *Singel-dejting* (2012, my translations) declare that “we’ve made cheating easy!”, it is through their service “discrete, conditions less and uncomplicated!”, and with reference to a consumerist discourse of happiness consumers are given the opportunity to realize their fantasies.

This is but one of several indicators of further change in the field since the theorists of late modernity abstracted the processes at work. Back in 1995, when Beck & Beck-Gernsheim wrote about changing love-relationships, and Giddens wrote about the plastic sexuality, this did not exist on the internet; it took another decade for the market to become a thinkable possibility.

Expected/sympathetic cheating is the theme of many pop songs, such as the 2009 hit song *Hotel room service* by Pitbull. The song itself is about sex with a refrain suggesting that the interpellated subject is to “*Forget about your boyfriend and meet me at the hotel room*” (Pitbull 2009). Another explicit example of popular music is Enrique Iglesias 2010 hit song *I like it*<sup>10</sup> on a similar theme with the following verse describing the situation:

**My girlfriend is out of town**

**And I'm all alone**

**Your boyfriend is on vacation**

**And he doesn't have to know**

Enrique Iglesias – I like it (2010)

In both of the above songs, sexual interaction outside of a monogamous relationship is a morally unproblematic possibility and/or even desirable. As long as the boyfriends do not find out, there does not have to be any internal conflict in cheating. In the context of these songs as popular culture, cheating sexuality may even be viewed like something attractive in itself, but only within a field of pure sexuality, as none of the songs imply any feelings of love or intentions of entering a new relationship.

In the songs performed by Pitbull (2009) and Iglesias (2010), it is implied that the partner of the interpellated subject will never find out about the sexual interaction. This makes it possible to sustain a romantic commitment within a monogamous discourse of love while at the same time pursuing individual satisfaction outside of the relationship. As with the cheating university students in Andersons study (2010), these songs describe practices that allow both discourses of sexual desire and individualized freedom to be sustained simultaneously with a separate discourse of romantic love and monogamous.

This practical ‘solution’ is of course not without risk, and most likely not without anxiety and stress for the cheater. Thinking of this practice as a possibility also implies the possibility of the other partner cheating as well. Still, as Anderson (2010) concludes, cheating is a

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<sup>10</sup> Featuring the very same Pitbull

practical solution to a conflict of cognitive dissonance of discourse. Separating conflicting discourse in separate practical fields like this makes it possible for a single subject to, in separate contexts, praise both cheating and monogamy.

#### **4.5 Risk centered on the relationship itself**

The relationship itself and the feelings of love are also threatened by expected risk in the discourse of love-relationships. Risks affecting the relationship itself are contrary to the two previous types of risks possibly met together, with unified effort from the two subjects who together actively constitute the relationship. But even if so, with both partners trying their best, there are threats understood as uncontrollable and unstoppable.

There are on the other hand also risks which are understood as strain or pressure that are potentially avoidable if both partners really try their best. See for example the doctoral thesis of Sara Eldén (2009) on the discourse of popular therapy, wherein relationships are understood as inherently problem-prone and in need of expert advice to be functional, while maintaining a normalized fantasy of the good couple.

Several relationship-focused risk-discourses are centered on risks of marriages and/or families. These risks are portrayed in countless expressions of popular culture and popular therapy as something expected to happen in any normative family and/or marriage. I would once again like to use the movie *Blue Valentine* (Cianfrance 2010) as an illustrative example. In *Blue Valentine*, all of the initial passion and joy are lost over time and with the establishment of an everyday life as a family. The motion picture is a narrative of several risks expected with this transformation. There is the risk that passion simply, and unavoidably, 'dries out' over time, and the risk that when the relationship becomes an everyday routine, it becomes dull and lose its romantic excitement. Dean and Cindy hardly have sex at all, and their interactions are centered on practical problems of everyday life. A third portrayed risk is that the relationship itself becomes a strain. This might be due to self-limiting, such as with Vicky in *Vicky Christina Barcelona* (Allen 2008), or through constant conflicting desires, fights and dissatisfaction as portrayed in *Blue Valentine* (Cianfrance 2010).

In this type of risk-discourse, commitment does not only limit autonomy and the pursuit of individual satisfaction, it also induces extra stress and anxiety centered on the 'us'. Even if the individualized risks of 'me' and 'you' could be avoided, the future of a relationship is always uncertain.

#### 4.6 Uncontested components of romantic love

Several of the discursive components of romantic love still remain more or less uncontested and stable<sup>11</sup>. Not the least because these components are still necessary to constitute love-relationships, and therefore have some role in the various ‘solutions’ to contradictions. Monogamy, with associated discourse of jealousy, are for example rarely criticized and often treated as the fundamental reality of love. In the quantified study by Bawin-Legros (2004), 95% of the respondents answered that love is monogamous, and in the qualitative study of Anderson (2010) all interviewees assumed monogamy as the only thinkable way of doing relationships. Since the discourse of monogamy is essential to the ‘reality’ of love-relationships, it simply has to be worked around rather than confronted.

The contradictions that come with monogamy are frequently ‘solved’ or avoided by practices/discourses such as cheating, open relationships and serial monogamy. Monogamy is almost always an assumed necessity, and associated jealousy almost always expected unavoidable. Monogamy is not faced with reflexive liquidification and is still treated as axiomatic in calculations of opportunity/risk; there are simply not many other options of the construct of love to consider.

Even in explicit attempts to reject monogamy its discursive core seems to constitute love-relationships. Consider the interview study of the discourse of practitioners of consensual non-monogamy by Finn & Malson (2008). Even though monogamy as an explicit concept was rejected, a discourse of dyadic-containment was still utilized to create ‘realness’ and authenticity of the relationship through constructing it as fixed, enclosed and in one way or another exclusive.

Interestingly, monogamy is sometimes problematized even in popular culture, such as the motion picture *Drei* (Tykwer 2010) and *Vicky Christina Barcelona* (Allen 2008). In *Drei* a poly relationship ends up solving all problems. This constructs alternatives to monogamy as a thinkable possibility. But although this makes alternatives thinkable, the ending of the movie is most likely interpreted as an unrealistic utopia, as a feel good ending of the movie. In *Vicky Christina Barcelona* (Allen 2008) a poly relationship of three is portrayed as something that might be a wonderful possibility if one just ‘thinks outside of the box’. But this soon ends in with jealousy, breaking the relationship apart, thereby simply reproducing love as monogamous. Although movies like these may be the beginning of further problematization

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<sup>11</sup> See section 3.4.1 for further detail on this.



of the monogamous discourse in popular culture, it is so far only scratching the surface without actually critiquing fundamental assumptions.

An even more fundamental and unproblematized component of the regime is the construct of love itself. Love itself is understood as a reality independent of social construction and as essentially identical across history and geography. It is constructed as a feeling and a process originating from inside a person, as an unstoppable and uncontrollable force. In collaboration with monogamy love is constructed as a limited resource and as focusable on single object at the time. Within this discourse one cannot love two persons equally much at the same time, and doing so would contradict the specialness of true love.

Love is inherently irrational<sup>12</sup> and strikes without warning when the right person is met. This ‘reality’ is intertwined with the essentialist discourse of the ‘true self’; the assumption that people carry with them an inherent and unique core personality that may trigger the uncontrollable process of love. Love is also understood as supposedly self-sustaining, a precondition for the ideal of the pure relationship to be persistent over time. Love must be unconditional, beyond rational control and irreducible in order to form a relationship-for-itself that lasts longer than a moment of fleeting feelings.

#### **4.7 Risk-diminishing strategies**

In an understanding of love-relationships as inherently problem-prone and uncertain it follows that people implement certain behaviors and modes of thinking in order to reduce internal stress and avoid various risks. This may be done through cognitive coping such as separating the use of contradictory discourse to separate contexts, or practical solutions such as behaviors and choices which avoid mechanisms of commitment. Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002) call these behaviors risk-diminishing strategies and argue that they are responsible for some of the changing patterns of relationships-family practices observed in statistics<sup>13</sup>.

Beck & Beck-Gernsheim use changing statistics to support their arguments, such as decreased marriage rates (with cohabitation as a sort of prolonged ‘safe’ testing ground), decreased birth rates and postponed child birth (European Union & Eurostat 2011). The authors view this as risk-reducing behaviors to avoid the trap of the family (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Avoiding or prolonging childbirth is, for example, a strategy to avoid

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<sup>12</sup> As expressed in the proverb ‘*love is blind*’

<sup>13</sup> See appendix section A2.1, and Eurostat (2007; 2011) for details.

getting ‘stuck’ with a partner<sup>14</sup>. See the empirical research of Lyn Turney (2011) on how childbirth can be seen as a risk, causing break-up, hostility between partners and possibly legal or economic complications.

Although Beck & Beck-Gernsheim’s (1995) primary focal point is the family and associated macro processes, their concept useful in order to understand any behavior or cognition in response to expected risks, as it ties discourse to practice. This dissolves the need for a structure/actor distinction and details the everyday poststructuralist (re)construction of social institutions. Risk-diminishing strategies are concrete micro mechanisms of change<sup>15</sup> and it is the ways people react to and handle the discursive risk-expectations of love-relationships that eventually end up as macro patterns in statistics.

Bauman (2003) might put risk-diminishing behaviors in terms of fears, but these strategies may also be rational choices, not because of expected anxiety but as a reflexive attempt to find a practical solution to discursive contradictions and practical problems. See for example the interviews by Budgeon and Roseneil (2004a) in which the interviewees expected problems of cohabitation based on a romantic dyad, and therefore chose to favor cohabitation based on friendships.

Giddens (1995), and particularly Bauman (2003), focus more than Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (1995) on love-relationships that are pre- or non-family, such as non-cohabiting love-relationships without any intentions of marriage or childbearing<sup>16</sup>. Although these relationships may be somewhat free of external bonds, there are still risks of invested commitment to consider; such as risking emotional wellbeing, self-esteem or resources invested (e.g. time, effort and prioritizations). As Bauman (2003) puts it, this situation easily come to be infected with ambivalence and fear, even though it’s a situation without the bonds of cohabitation, common children, shared social lives and/or shared economy to include in risk calculations. Even when ‘living together apart’ there are still potential losses to consider, such as being left behind, being hurt or investing more than the other part. These relationships are regularly exposed to all three types of risk-discourse, and are probably even more so than less ‘pure’ relationships with practical considerations acting as centrifugal mechanisms.

Risk-diminishing strategies are in this context ways to avoid being psychologically vulnerable and to ensure that oneself comes out on top in case of emotional evacuation. Terms such as ‘*commitment phobia*’ and ‘*fear of intimacy*’ (sometimes termed ‘*intimacy anxiety*’),

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<sup>14</sup> And/or even ‘stuck’ with the child and the associated expenses in economic and temporal resources.

<sup>15</sup> Discursive problematizations leading to creative hybrid discourse are another.

<sup>16</sup> Three important examples of risk-diminishing strategies right there!

introduced in late modernity, are used to describe certain risk-diminishing behaviors fueled by the anxiety of discursively expected risks of couplehood. Simply put; if you are not too committed, not too invested, not feeling too much and not too officially coupled, you do not stand to lose as much when things inevitably come crashing down.

## Chapter 5: The flux of power

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Assuming that the contradictions of the discursive regimes in this field<sup>17</sup> force change due to practical conflicts, emotional stress and cognitive dissonance, this chapter discuss how different solutions might play out. In section 5.1 I mention how the theorists presented in chapter four positions themselves, with an elaboration on the position of Beck & Beck-Gernsheim which I find most fruitful due to its nuanced relation to empirical observations and compatibility with the discursive perspective of this thesis. The second section briefly discusses some ongoing general changes of social interaction that are pressing for further discursive developments towards relational individualization. In section 5.3 I discuss some explicit attempts at solutions through new relationship practice and hybrid discourse, creatively combined with the intention to create freer and less strained relationships.

### 5.1 Late modern predictions

If allowed to polarize, it can be said that Giddens (1995) and Bauman (2003) make opposite predictions on how the field of love-relationships will develop. Giddens views are optimistic although cautious. He sees possibilities of emancipation, democratization, norm criticism and a world where “normal sexuality” is but one of many possible lifestyles (Giddens 1995). Bauman on the other hand is pessimistic and sees ambivalence, anxiety and insecurity in the lack of moral institutions (Bauman 2003).

Beck & Beck-Gernsheim argue for a more nuanced and neutral position. They see ‘uncertain freedoms’ in risks/opportunities, as well as ambivalence, people living with contradictions, and a pluralism of new hybrid forms of relationships (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995). It can be expected that the contradictions detailed in this thesis force discursive change towards new ways of organization intimacy that will ease the dissonances in discourse and practice, and make relationships less anxiety-prone.

In the predictions of Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (1995), this change will be towards more rationalized and calculable ways of doing relationships, and with that love will lose some of its mythology. The authors predict a multiplicity of institutionalized forms of relationships, where marriage and the family might still live on in some form. As with the process of individualization they claim that modernization is unstoppable and that changes in these

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<sup>17</sup> As detailed in section 3.4

directions therefore are unavoidable. In terms of discourse I would say that the discursive ethic of individualized freedom is unstoppable, at least for now.

### *5.1.1 Fragmented and negotiated*

Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (1995) predict further fragmentation of intimacy, and believe that market forces will continue to push for unrestrained individuals. Ideally this unrestrained and mobile individual will have a large web of contacts supporting different needs at different times, with intimacy spread out over a multitude of relationships, avoiding loneliness by organizing one's life around various social interactions. This scenario would result in an intense longing for closeness as well as a fear of being left out, with attempts to make this manageable through the extensive social life of semi-closeness free of dependence. New risks and their reflexive calculation will accordingly lead people towards more contractual/negotiated relationship practices. This is expected to devalue and demystify the discourse of love, making aspects of relationships that used to be unquestionable open to problematization and (re)negation.

The question for the future asked by Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (1995) is how people will be able to 'live together separately', as two autonomous individuals cooperating without too much constrain or anxiety. This is where new ways of social organization must, and will, spawn. The authors suggest both fundamental changes of society, leaving behind old modern values and the modern economic system as well as re-thinking relationships. Though Beck & Beck-Gernsheim's visions of a better suited society are appealing, they are outside of the scope of this thesis, and not likely to come around any time soon. To 're-think relationships' on the other hand is to adapt discourse and practice in order to avoid their contradictions, something that is very much happen all around us, right now.

### *5.1.2 The renaissance of friendship*

One way of reorganizing intimate relationships, as suggested by Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, is to up-value friendship (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995). Friendships are less risky and vulnerable than love, and can supply intimacy and closeness without a necessary fusion of biographies. A renaissance of friendship fits the authors predictions of a more fragmented and important social network with less commitment to each relationship of intimacy. Beck & Beck-Gernsheim go on with the suggestion that people might live in communities of individuals, with friendship and negotiation as the fundament for intimacy and safety, rather than the discourse of romantic love.

The decentering of romantic love in favor for friendship is supported by Roseneil and Budgeon (2004a) in both theory and empirical observation. When interviewing people who had chosen not to cohabit with a romantic partner they found that friendships could indeed provide a basis for intimacy, care, stability and safety, and could possibly replace the normative dyadic cohabitation. This possibility is often central to discourse solutions such as relationship anarchy (Strandell 2011), and *The Ethical Slut* (Easton & Hardy 2008), a guide to alternative consensual non-monogamy.

These possibilities are sometimes also problematized in contemporary popular culture. Movies such as *Friends with benefits* (Gluck 2011) and *Friends with kids* (Westfeldt 2011) explore practices outside of the romantic regime. *Friends with kids* problematize the possibility of parenthood based on friendship rather than romance. The story is centered on two friends intending to raise a child together while avoid the risks of romantic love – such as constrain on autonomy (“*I will be one hundred percent committed to this half the time.*”) and expected dissatisfaction (“*[...] we don’t want to fall into the trap that most of our friends have.*”). In *Friends with benefits* (Gluck 2011) the possibility of non-romantic sex are portrayed as a way of getting the benefits of sex while avoiding the hazards of emotional commitment. However, both of these *romantic* comedies end up as failed projects that eventually couldn’t resist the power of love. This simply reconstructs the ‘reality’ of love as uncontrollable by the rational mind, much in the same way as the movies problematizing monogamy in section 4.6 reinforce established discourse.

## **5.2. A changing social space**

Beck & Beck-Gernsheim were probably largely correct in their analysis of what was to come in the field of relationships. Now, 18 years later, I would say that at least the younger generations of the most ‘western west’ are in a position similar to their prediction; highly individualized with large social networks of semi-closeness, avoiding too much dependency and faced with a multitude of possibilities for doing relationships.

Discursive change is accelerating itself as new generations grow up in a different discursive context, with new experiences shaping their understanding of relationships (Hughes 2005; Smart 2006). When children grow up with divorce as a normalized rule rather than as an exception, and a cognitive model of relationships inherently as fragile, they live in a different discursive reality from the generations before them. There is interplay between discourses of

‘reality’, their very real effects, and how those effects further shape the way reality is constructed.

Through various processes such as this, the social space itself is changing over time, and its rules are changed in historically new ways. One such process is what Giddens (1990) calls modernity’s conquest of space; the reduction of the meaning of distance. Social and geographical mobility is higher than ever before, something which conveys a multitude of changes to the field of love-relationships. As mentioned in chapter three the local are no longer a boundary and people are able to cross cultural borders in several new ways. Long distance relationships have become much more common, with people ‘living together apart’, in different localities with different everyday experiences. The conquest of space also means that, coupled with increased urbanization and growing cities, the availability of alternative partners and/or potential sexual encounters increase dramatically. You do no longer simply have the local town to choose within, it is more probable to have a city of perhaps a million inhabitants or more, and the possibility to with ease travel to several other huge cities.

This effect is likely multiplied even further with the expansion of the internet and new social media. Using social network sites and advanced smart phones people are now able to connect in new ways. Ways that are almost effortless<sup>18</sup> and gives access to a vast market of potential social interactions.

Together with individualization these changes in availability have a huge impact on the potential risks and uncertainties of relationships. Your partner has, from his/her cell phone, without even leaving the apartment, access to hundreds of thousands of alternative partners, against whom you may be compared, or with whom your partner might be having an affair with, at any given time.

These changes are themselves organizational rather than discursive, but they are put further pressure on discursive change by adding increasing centrifugal stress to love-relationships. The changes also support the kind of future that Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (1995) predicted; where a multitude of relationships based less on romantic love and more of friendship and practical arrangements are the norm. By increasing potential relations and making connection easier people can build relations of semi-closeness that does not have to be to cover every single of each other’s needs.

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<sup>18</sup> A complete conquest of space: now you do not have to traverse any distance at all to meet new people.

### 5.3 Creating solutions

In the clash between the discursive regimes of romantic love and individualized freedom, one can of course not expect a simple solution to all specific conflicts. Solutions come in small scale changes to specific conflicting discursive components, in the form of practical workarounds or hybrid discourse.

#### 5.3.1 Practical solutions

An example of this is the institution of serial monogamy that is now almost unavoidable. But its practice was once in conflict with the discourse of romantic love, which eventually changed to a discourse that incorporated this practice without problematic contradictions. Constructing love as something that may happen several times during a lifetime, and not simply a matter of finding *the one and only*, allows legitimate serial monogamy, wherein relationships can be abandoned when dissatisfactory.

A similar process might now be at hand with the practice of open relationships – relationships in which emotional exclusivity is maintained while sexuality is unrestrained. This practice is an attempt to solve contradicting desires and avoid expected normalized cheating, while still maintaining the core construct of love from the romantic discourse. This form of relationship can only be conceived within a discourse that separates love from sexuality, quite unlike earlier romantic discourse wherein the two were inseparable (Giddens 1995). Note, though, that jealousy is in no way deconstructed by this ‘solution’ and it is still a likely source of ambivalence and anxiety.

Further practical solutions worth mentioning are cohabitation as a way of living together without risking marriage (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995), avoiding or postponing childbirth, living alone, avoiding commitment/intimacy in order to escape emotional vulnerability (Bauman 2003), or maintaining a broad network of connected but not-too-close others.

#### 5.3.2 Deconstructing the romantic relationship

Ambitious and explicit attempts at solving discursive contradictions can be found in popular literature such as *The Ethical Slut* (Easton & Hardy 2008) and the discourse/practice of relationship anarchy. These alternative discourses criticize romantic love as outdated, impractical, unnatural or simply as in the way of individualized freedom. Relationship anarchy, for example, assumes individualized freedom as an absolute value, where nothing but free choice are morally justifiable.



These are attempts to liquefy romantic norms, definitions and categories, in the name of freedom in order to free an essentialist love, understood a priori as a natural process originating from a core self, while at the same time problematizing the necessity of jealousy and love as a limited resource. These attempts to create discursive change often take the form of rhetoric arguments for an alternative discourse by mobilizing the powerful regimes individualized freedom and consumerist happiness against the unjustifiable constraints of romantic love.

The move towards a ‘demystified’ love, and a renaissance of friendships, suggested by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) might be a likely discursive development given the preconditions presented in this thesis, not the least when examining proposed alternative discourse. Although certain components of romantic love still remain powerful they may very well be the next targets of problematization. Monogamous discourse can for example be expected to be criticized further and in larger scale, since it is the site of several contradictions, and is impossible to justify against institutionalized freedom. We have already seen problematizations of monogamy in movies such as *Vicky Christina Barcelona* (Allen 2008) and *Drei* (Tykwer 2010), and the direct and critique of books such as *The Ethical Slut* (Easton & Hardy 2008), and discourses such as that of relationship anarchy (Strandell 2011).

### 5.3.3 *The possibilities and impossibilities of love*

All the mentioned attempts to solve contradictions are all done with individualized freedom as a priori. To put it bluntly, people are trying to remove what is understood as social ‘rules’ left over from tradition and unfit in a modern world. Using terms such as ‘mythological beliefs’ romantic love (Easton & Hardy 2008), or calling its institutions ‘outdated anachronisms’ (Sveland & Wennstam 2011), the discourse/practice is understood as nothing but restrictive norms in oppression of love.

But while liquidification surely eliminates some limitations (making some things possible) it simultaneously limits certain possibilities (making other things impossible). Discourse is constitutional and productive (Foucault 1980), and dissolving the power/truth of a certain discursive construct also means dissolving what the discourse made possible. In the case of monogamy a complete liquidification, as proposed by relationship anarchists amongst others, would deconstruct both subject positions as well as constitutive elements of love itself.

What monogamy does, amongst other things, is to assign a single individual a position as the single chosen partner of love. Specialness is constructed through defining the relation as monogamous love, and through constructing the relationship as fixed, enclosed and/or

exclusive as Finn & Malson (2008) has shown that even some practitioners of non-monogamy do. This specialness have important consequences itself, such as creating closeness, intimacy, uniqueness through the privileged 'inside' of the relationship. Without this construction of specialness, and associated subject positions (i.e. boyfriend, primary partner, spouse), love itself will inevitably be something different. Some deconstructions of specialness are already under way through practices such as serial monogamy (removing the specialness of devoting to a unique partner for life) and open relationships (if sexuality is not exclusive, and sex is something that comes easy, its specialness and thus intimacy are reduced).

## Chapter 6: Tying up ends

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In this closing chapter section 6.1 are a short summary of some of the key points presented in this thesis. In section 6.2 I comment and reflect on the thesis and its subject-matter.

### 6.1 Summary

Prominent social theorists of late modernity, such as Anthony Giddens, Zygmunt Bauman and Ulrich Beck & Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, have previously theorized on how processes of late modernity lead to fundamental changes in how people do love-relationships. This is attributed to processes such as liquidification and individualization, with mechanisms such as reflexivity and risk awareness. With a poststructuralist intention of adding further theoretical clarity and complexity to how these abstract processes are able to influence people, I translate these theories to a theory of discourse. A theory of discourse is, I suggest, able to account for macro-micro interactions and changing social constructions of love-relationships.

On the basis of the theoretical narratives of said theorists, I propose a synthesized discursive understanding of two major discursive regimes at conflict (romantic love and individualized freedom), with incompatible components, and a balance of power leaning more and more towards the regime of individualized freedom. In late modernity major institutions of stability in love-relationships have been liquefied, save for the only remaining centrifugal force – the discourse of romantic love itself, which is now under siege.

The conflicts of these regimes are a source of cognitive dissonance, emotional anxiety and practical complications, pressuring discursive change in the field of love-relationships. These conflicts expressed as problematizations and risk-discourses of love-relationships, which people inevitably have to relate to in some reflexive way. In chapter four I detail some of these risk-discourses, and illustrate my statements with some problematizations of these conflicts expressed in narratives of popular culture. Faced with discursively expected risks, and the anxiety they provoke, people employ risk-diminishing strategies; cognitions and behaviors to avoid conflicting practice/discourse (for example non-cohabitation and open relationships).

I argue that the discourse of romantic love is now under heavy pressure for imminent changes, due to increasing individualization of social organization, a lack of stabilizing supporting institutions, and not the least its increasing conflicts with the ethic of individualized freedom. Several aspects of the discursive regime of romantic love are already highly

criticized, and attempts at developing discursive alternatives are made, increasing its problematization and accelerating change. These critiques all seem to assume individualized freedom as an unquestionable value, and romantic love as the problem. Due to an unproblematic essentialistic understanding of love few, if any, attempts at change reflect upon how deconstructions of romantic love will change the nature of love itself. In this context I agree with Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (1995) and Budgeon & Roseneil (2004a) in that friendship might be increasingly valued as a less risky and anxiety-provoking practice of intimacy and care.

## 6.2 Closing comments

While the statistics of Eurostat (2007; 2011) and Bawin-Legros (2004) represent entire populations, it is in my opinion highly likely that certain sub-populations in the western world are more influenced than others by the discourse of individualized freedom and thus also normalized fragility. I assume that younger generations are generally more exposed, due to a primary socialization within well-established late modern discourse, with no previous socialization through other discourse, which could possibly limit the influence of these discourses.

It can be expected that northern Europe are, generally, more exposed to late modern processes than southern Europe, with further progressed individualization and liquidification, as is indicated in statistics<sup>19</sup>. Another group of people likely to be more exposed to normalized fragility is the so-called “LGBTQ”. This loosely tied group consists of ‘the non-heteronormative’ – people with weaker ties to normative discourse of love-relationships. Given these speculative assumptions, it is likely that young LGBTQ -people of northern Europe are especially influenced by the discursive ethics of individualized freedom, something that warrants further empirical research.

If so, the developments detailed in this thesis could have significantly different impact on different sub-populations and are therefore only represented in a moderately in statistics. This means that some changes of ‘the future’ have already happen to some people, who are living on the frontiers of late modern intimacy organization. This won’t be represented in statistics until processes of change have progressed further for the majority of the population. This also means that the statements of this thesis must be understood as theoretical exaggerations,

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<sup>19</sup> The northern nations major increase in births outside of marriage occurred about a decade before most other member states (European Communities & Eurostat, 2007)

ignoring how significant parts of population probably operate within a less contested and fragile discursive field, with associated practices of considerable stability.

I have argued that the fragility of love-relationships is countered mainly by the discourse of romantic love. I have also suggested that this discourse is under strain due to conflicts with individualized freedom and that this conflict produce specific risk-discourses that are reflexively considered in love-relationships. These risk-diminishing behaviors and cognitions can be said to force rapid changes, and account for large scale statistical patterns. This is in my opinion an important field for empirical research. One may ask exactly what risks people expect, how these risks and their mechanisms are understood, and how this affect people's thinking, feelings and practices of relationships.

If Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (1995) were correct in that love will become more rationalized and de-mythologized, and given the premise that love is constituted by discourse that may be successively deconstructed, one may also ask if we could imagine a future without love (as we know it). As a constructionist the answer is clearly yes, but it is difficult to imagine exactly how the discourse of love would be completely removed from our culture. It is more probable that the oncoming discourse of intimacy will be constructed through a creative hybrid discourse together with the discourse of friendship.

Further problematizations are to be expected regarding the contradictory components of love-relationships that are unjustifiable in the face of reflective individualized freedom, but so far have remained stable. It is for example difficult for me to see how monogamy may be maintained as constitutional of love in the long run, at least in terms of complete exclusivity. Perhaps sexual exclusivity will be dissolved, or maybe love and friendships will be various levels on the same scale of intimacy, with a single or a few primary partner(s) in one end. Whatever happens, it will surely be different from now.

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# Appendix 1: List of terms and concepts

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**Love-relationships:** Love-relationships are the term I use for the social field of this thesis. The term is chosen for being both wide and specific at the same time. It is wide because it allows an entire range of practices and feelings on a scale ranging from feelings of love in one end and practical organization of relationships on the other. This allows both loose flings as well as decade old marriages held together “for the kids”. The term is specific because it specifies a type of relationships - *relationships constructed within a discourse of love*.

**The discursive regime of romantic love:** used in this thesis to capture the dominant discursive ideal of love- relationships in the late modern western society. The term ‘romantic’ is intended to exclude other discourse of love, such as the love between parent and child, or the love one feels for a pet, a hobby, an object or a place. This discourse tells us what love is; it constitutes the very core of love, and carries implications for the way we understand situations, relationships and feelings. Not to be confused with Anthony Giddens usage of the term romantic love as a modern ideal. See section 3.4.1 for a detailed elaboration of this discursive regime.

**The discursive ethic of individualized freedom:** Freedom is in late modernity discursively tied to the individual on a fundamental level. It’s first in late modernity that freedom has gained the moral high ground over all possible objections, thus reaching a previously unseen discursive power. Within the discourse of individualized freedom internal reference is ultimately the only acceptable and legitimate moral compass. These ethics of individualized freedom are intertwined with processes of individualization. The discursive ethic of individualized freedom motivates and justifies processes of individualization and liquidification. See section 3.4.1 for a detailed elaboration of this discursive regime.

**Late modernity:** Late modernity is here used to specify the contemporary phase of western modernity since about 1960. I have chosen to use the term late modernity over other alternatives such as postmodernity because continuous processes of modernity are central to the theories used in this thesis. While postmodernity captures important breaks from previous modernity, these turns are understood in relation to previous processes of modernity.



**Risk-discourse & Risk-diminishing strategies:** A risk-discourse is a sub-discourse of larger understandings of love-relationships that deals with a specific conflict through explicit problematization. These conflicts are expressions of the contradictions of romantic love and individualized freedom. Risk-discourses are knowledges of expected risks inherent in relationships, the construct of love or the way people work. In order to handle the uncertainties and the anxiety provoked by discourses of expected risks people engage in risk-diminishing strategies, practices and cognitions that reduce internal stress by avoiding expected risks.

**Discourse:** The concept of discourse is a theoretical construct used to grasp how meaning-carrying practices, such as but not limited to language, constructs the world and sets the limits, rules and potentials for human thought and action. Thus discourse structure behavior and can be crudely defined as *a specific way of understanding*. Discourse is the prerequisite for communication and thought; the implied knowledge that gives meaning to words and actions. Communication, and in the same way any other human thought, are consequently constrained by implicit rules; the systems of relations that what we call discourse. A discourse is in that way similar to the concept of scientific paradigms and defines what is possible to think in a given context.

## Appendix 2: Synopses of cited empirical data

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In the preceding decades there have been significant changes in how people understand, perceive and practice love, relationships. There are many noteworthy indicators, I'd say countless, and these changes are far from over although their nature might be something different again in the decades to come. This appendix is intended as a reference, summarizing the cited studies and statistics of this thesis. The first section concerns official European statistics of marriage, divorce, fertility, birth outside of marriage and single person households of the previous decades as reported by Eurostat. The second section summarizes a few interesting empirical studies of the effects of the theorized changes.

### A2.1 European statistics

Official statistic reports state that fewer and fewer people marry and marriage is becoming much less stable (European Union & Eurostat 2011). Between 1970 and 2007 marriage rates dropped by 38% in the Union and at the same time divorce became more than twice as common.

The mean female age at childbirth has been steadily increasing in the EU the past thirty years; women are now postponing childbirth into their 30s in most member states (European Union & Eurostat 2011). Birth rates outside of marriage are increasing in almost every member state and in some, mostly in northern Europe; the majority of births are now outside of marriage. This rate has increased sharply since the 1980s with the exceptions of Sweden and Denmark where the largest increase happen sometime between 1970 and 1980.

Diagram 1: percentage of live births outside of marriage in the EU.

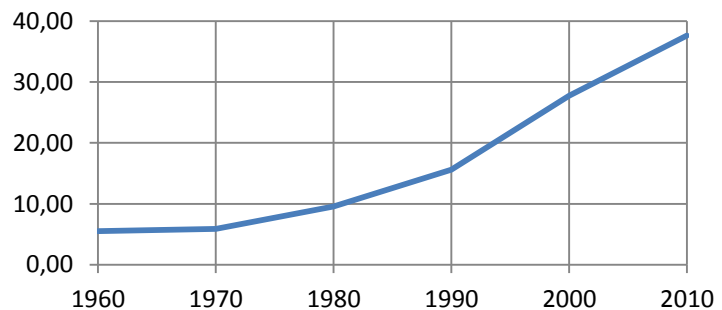
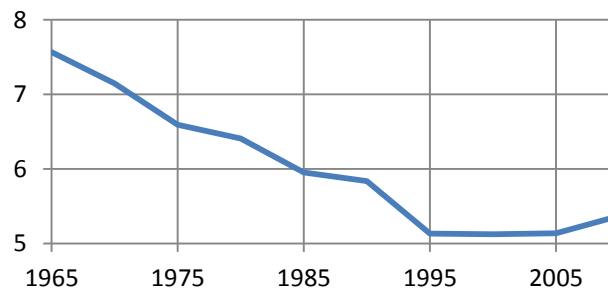


Diagram 2: Fertility rate in the EU since 1965 measured in millions of births.



Overall fertility-rates which have been dropping for decades are now stabilized or even slightly increasing, though still well below the required 2.1 children per woman in order to maintain replacement level (European Union & Eurostat 2011).

One out of eight citizen are living now alone in the EU, with percentages as high as 17% in member states such as Germany and Finland (European Communities & Eurostat 2007). Average family and household size in the EU has been declining since the 60s and continue to decline as more and more people live in smaller households or alone (European Union & Eurostat 2011).

## **A2.2 Empirical observations**

### *A2.2.1 Quantitative intimacy*

Drawing upon the theories of Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck, Bawin-Legros (2004) used Belgian survey data to compare attitudes with theoretical narratives. The data suggests that significant elements of the ideal of romantic love remain very strong; e.g. 95% of participants reported that to them love is monogamous. But within this group the answers were evenly divided between the belief in a 'one and only true love' (45,1%) and a belief in serial monogamy (49,9%) as a normative model of love.

The Belgian data also confirms other European data in that fidelity remains very important (Bawin-Legros 2004). Bawin-Legros note that fidelity is demanded only as long as love lasts as an ambition for an individually tied unique, undivided love, free of lies and in pursuit of fusion, rather than as a result of moralism. While half of the participants (49,5%) viewed constant thoughts of someone else as unfaithfulness a large majority (95,6%) saw sexual intercourse as unfaithfulness.

The author suggests that the struggle for fusion of love, and at the same time the autonomy of individualization, result in very fragile relationships that are constantly tried against the potential return/benefit of investment (Bawin-Legros 2004). In the Belgian data this is illustrated in the statements that people do right to break up if there are no passion left (64,4%) or even if there are no common interests left about which one can talk (46%).

### *A2.2.2 Avoiding the ties of pregnancy*

Turney (2011) interviewed Australian women whose former partner ended the relationship and/or cohabitation because of a pregnancy, and subsequently denied paternity of the child. In Australia, DNA-based paternity tests are marketed to separated or divorced men by inducing

insecurity and offering 'peace of mind'. This marketing strategy relies heavily on a national moral panic of increased infidelity/cheating amongst mothers who supposedly indict the wrong men of paternity for financial gains, something referred to as 'paternity fraud'.

Amongst the interviewed, some pregnancies were accidental while other were planned but followed by a change of mind by the father (Turney 2011). The majority of the fathers ended up paying no or very little child support and had nothing further to do with the child. In the women's narrative the fathers were self-centered, and by denying biological paternity they also rejected social fatherhood and all ties to the mother.

Within the context of consensual unions without the stabilizing structure of the marriage institution, relationships resemble Anthony Giddens concept of the pure relationships; continuously renegotiated, fragile and lasting only so long as they remain mutually beneficial (Turney 2011). Turney argue that that pregnancy confronts the individualized ideal of the pure relationships by inducing ties and restrains, unequally proportional in relation to gender due to the father's ability to reject ties to the child.

### *A2.2.3 The problematic relationship*

In her doctoral thesis from 2009 Sara Eldén examined how narratives of popular therapy in self-help literature and television shows construct the normative heterosexual couple and a struggle, or work, which is understood as a necessity to maintain a relationship. Axiomatic to this popular therapy is a discourse of the autonomous individual and the narratives tend to psychologize (in effect individualize) whatever problem the couple face. Eldén shows that there is a tension between the individual and the couple, where sometimes 'me' has to be protected against 'us', and the other way around.

Although the discourse of popular therapy normalizes the problematic couple it also assumes a normalized fantasy of the possible creation of the good, or happy, relationship through hard work for which the individuals involved are responsible (Eldén 2009). This individualization is expressed in notions such as '*one can only change oneself and never ones partner*'. But even though relationships are constructed as normatively problematic and fragile, the idea of the good couple is actually never threatened as unrealistic or impossible. Eldén argues that this can be theoretically viewed as a breakdown of various institutionalized practices that once framed the relationship while the ideological discourse of romantic love very much still lives.

#### *A2.2.4 Children of divorce*

Carol smart (2006) interviewed 60 children/adolescents whose parents had divorced a few years earlier in order to obtain reconstructed narratives about the event and its consequences. The narratives of the children were often several overlapping stories with frequent contradictions. Smart argues that these accounts, seen in a constructionist perspective, are reflexive (re)evaluations and understandings of oneself, experiences and events, and that divorce is an important enough event to have significant cognitive impact. These understandings later play a role in the interpretation of and expectations on future experiences of relationships.

The narratives presented in the interviews were widely varying in structure and emotional content (Smart 2006). Some of these children fully blended into new extended families and did not use concepts such as half-brother/sister or step-mother/father at all. Another group told stories of more complicated structure, with more new relationships sometimes leading to conflicting constructs of oneself and the family. These children sometimes spoke of the divorce as hard/traumatic but saw themselves as coping survivors and didn't identify their new structure of relationships as a source of problems. A third group told narrative of victimization, where the divorce had done injury. This led to either identifying individuals or a specific situation as the cause of the divorce and subsequent unhappiness, or an understanding of all families as inherently problem-prone. Finally there were children with very traumatic experiences. Fundamental to these stories were intense hostility between the parents both before and after the divorce. Though divorce has different meaning for the interviewed children, they all believed family life is not to be taken for granted.

#### *A2.2.5 Adult children of divorce*

By interviewing adults whose parents once had divorced, and with theoretical reference to Anthon Giddens and Ulrich Becks, Kate Hughes (2005) examined how love and marriage is transforming from a lifelong commitment to a normalization of fragility. A common theme amongst the interviewed in discussing the purpose of relationships were a discourse of personal growth. The participants generally stated that gender roles, duties and obligations are now replaced by ideas of self-actualization, individualism and agency of reflexive change.

The participants of the study had a pragmatic approach to relationships and many did reflexively weight the benefits/costs of a relationship in relation to other alternatives (Hughes 2005). Many of the unpartnered participants expressed a strong desire to find a partner, in

particular someone who meets their personal needs. Hughes note that a relationship and partner, much like practiced sexuality, is a lifestyle choice that is an important part in the construction of the self (the autobiography, or reflexive narrative, of one's life). All participants expressed the belief that all relationships come to an end, as is commonly amongst children of divorce according to Hughes. Some participants saw relationships as transitory, lasting until further notice, and pointed out that people change. Many participants expressed hostility towards the nuclear family and argued against it in terms of constraints.

#### *A2.2.6 Monogamy and cheating*

In 2010 Anderson interviewed male heterosexual undergraduates about their experience of monogamy and cheating. The interviewed students all identified as monogamous, even though the majority admitted cheating on their partner (Anderson 2010). Monogamy was perceived and understood as the ideal, something natural and the only way to *actually* love someone. The students expressed conflicting beliefs between monogamy as the natural outcome of love and the belief in a biological male drive for recreational sex even when in love (resulting in cheating and endangering the relationship). The students also expressed a belief that the interest in, and frequency of, sex within a monogamous relationship declined over time, thus not being a sufficient source for sexual fulfillment. For most of the interviewed this conflict resulted in tension and stress, sometimes in anxiety and feelings of guilt. Most participants had not heard of so called open relationships and found it an unacceptable alternative.

All participants who did cheat unanimously state that they didn't do it out of a lack of love or in pursuit of a new relationship (Anderson 2010). They all attributed their cheating to the innate male drive for recreational sex. Anderson states that monogamy is an institution of enormous hegemonous power, so powerful that no other alternatives were viable. At the same time the various desirous for recreational sex created a cognitive dissonance, a tension, between two modes of thinking. Anderson interpret cheating as a practical solution to this conflict, one of weighing pros and cons and seeking out at least a temporary relief of the stress caused by the conflict. Within a culture where monogamism holds complete dominance no other alternatives are available if one wishes to satisfy both a romantic desire and a desire for recreational sex.

### *A2.2.7 The dyadic discourse of love*

Through interviews and discourse analysis Finn & Malson (2008) explored how a discourse of monogamy was deployed in accounts of consensual non-monogamy, even though the interviewees rejected monogamy. Finn & Malson argue that a central aspect of monogamous discourse is what they call the dyadic-containment. The dyadic-containment is the discursive construction of the authentic or real relationships through constructing it as fixed, enclosed and exclusive. The practitioners of non-monogamy, even non-dyadic ones, used a discourse of an indestructible primary core-relationship with an element of exclusivity, such as emotional, intimacy, the concept of love, or 'specialness'. This creates boundaries of inside and outside and effectively creates the relationship of love as intelligible and 'real' within a hegemonies discourse of monogamy that is closely tied to the discursive essence of love. In relation to theory by Michel Foucault the authors note that this practice can be understood in terms of power as both constrictive and creative; the discourse of dyadic-containment serves to create a 'real' relationship.

### *A2.2.8 Practices of intimacy beyond couplehood*

In order to support a theoretical argument of new practices of intimacy and care beyond 'the family' Roseneil and Budgeon committed case studies of narrative interviews with people who had chosen not to cohabit with a partner (2004a). The interviewees had all decentered the sexual partnership in favor for friendships, sometimes blurring the discursive divides love/friendship or friends/family. Two of the interviewed had chosen to reject the traditional couple in favor for a wide network of friendships in order to provide stability for their children. Fearing commitment and content with what they already had, they saw traditional relationships as risky and unnecessary, with the risks of couplehood outweighing the benefits.

Another interviewee had chosen to avoid cohabitation in order to not move away from the locality where his friends lived, and out of fear that living together would put strain upon the relationship (Budgeon & Roseneil 2004a). Yet another of the interviewed were skeptical of the value of couplehood, arguing against it in terms of limitations/constraints and with the proposition that people in traditional dyadic relationships tend to drop friendships. For all the interviewed friendship provided intimacy, care and stability in place of what is often assumed only possible within couplehood.