

Chapter 1

Love

- Why romantic love matters in uncertain times

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Introduction

While love can be defined much more broadly than just romantic love, it is romantic love that is the focus of this chapter. Like Swen Seebach (2017) and Stevi Jackson (1999) before me, I start this chapter with a personal account. It is not a coincidence that to find a way in to talk about love, starting from the personal is established practice. Love is elusive and hard to pin down, and it is rarely defined beyond a few similes or comparisons. So what is love? When my sister had her wedding in 2008, I was in the throes of my PhD thesis, asking why young women like my sister still want to, and get, married? At this point I was a ‘cynical’ anti-marriage feminist who was reading Lee Comer and Simone de Beauvoir and their critiques of marriage. Comer published *Wedlocked Women* in 1974 (two years before my parents married), and yet reading her in 2007-2008, the arguments felt so contemporary. Comer’s discussion of love was enlightening and her idea of using love as a legitimating ideology for marriage still holds strong: ‘So that sex is legitimized, so that attraction and warmth and affection can be called “love”, which can then be parcelled into marriage and one woman and one man come to symbolise an *institution*’ (Comer 1974:220 original emphasis). Comer also talks about the unrealistically high expectations that are brought to marriage and among these, the hope of finding personal salvation, for if ‘we didn’t expect to find personal salvation through married love we wouldn’t be disappointed in not finding it’ (Comer 1974:224).

I offered to read one of these passages from Comer at my sister’s wedding; I was maid of honour. She declined the offer. My sister was a very typical bride: in her late twenties, in a monogamous relationship for a number of years, previously unmarried, childless, cohabiting with her husband-to-be, working full-time post-university. So why was she getting married? And what was the role of love in all of this? Given that marriage is no longer necessary for many people to obtain freedom and independence, it has come to mean something different in contemporary Western societies. Marriage is now about love. Of course, the meaning of love is also in question and many point to the changed nature of love in late modernity (e.g. Giddens 1992). With love seeming increasingly fragile and painful, and marriages consequently insecure and impermanent, why was my sister doing this? Love was part of it, but there was more to it

than that. My parents and family were all happy and excited about the wedding. Although not exerting direct pressure to marry, this response indicates some positive orientation to marriage over simple cohabitation. And thirteen years after their marriage my sister and her husband have two children; marriage was clearly a precursor to expanding their family. Taken together, these observations imply that there are dimensions to love (and marriage) that go beyond personal satisfaction, emotions, recognition, or authenticity (Illouz 2012). In this chapter, I argue that love is an emotion, but it is also more than this. Crucially, it encompasses a morality and an ethics that goes beyond the individual and re-embeds them into wider communities of shared moral practices (following Evans 2003 and Seebach 2017). In her wedding, my sister was not only demonstrating her love for her partner, she was embedding herself within a physical community of family, friends and witnesses, and within a broader social community, bounded by the morality of love.

In the first section of this chapter I set out some of the key previous discussions of love, highlighting its contested nature as an emotion, as well as the central social and rational components of the emotion. The next section aims to explore further the connection between love and marriage, with morality as a central touchstone. This discussion of morality is continued in the third and final section which delves more deeply into the theoretical contributions of Eva Illouz and Swen Seebach to provide an answer to this chapter's central question: why does love matter now?

What is love?

Love is unknowable

It has been noted by many authors that love is impossible to define, except in its absence or in relation to something else. For Stevi Jackson (1999), this unknowingness is a product of romantic convention which tells us that 'love is in essence indefinable, mysterious, outside rational discourse' (Jackson 1999:101). It might also be a linguistic problem; as Susan Hendrick and Clyde Hendrick (1992) note, the English language is deficient in useful and appropriate ways to express and discuss love, meaning we depend on metaphors to convey its complexity. Mary Evans (2003: 27) likewise notes that love is typically spoken of 'in metaphors of illness and disease: a feeling which 'infects' and 'disturbs' the orderly presentation of the self. Moreover 'we no longer have a language of love, in that we have deconstructed love into sex and romance whilst at the same time removing love from any close *or necessary* association with any form of social relationship' (Evans 2003:78, original emphasis). Since we can, and do, use love to refer to anything from our intimate partner and children to ice cream or our favourite pen, the word itself is a disempowered shell.

For Evans (2003) and Jackson (1999) romance works to make love mysterious, to accord it a special legitimacy and place it ‘on some higher plane inaccessible to reason or explanation’ (Jackson 1999:103). The relationship between love and reason, or rationality is indeed far more complex. From my own work, love is an undercurrent, a felt emotion but one that almost goes without saying. It is a private emotion that when confronted head on cannot be unpicked or fully explained nor described (Carter 2013). Indeed, to avoid talking about love, the young women interviewed in my research presented instead ‘cover stories’, using phrases such as ‘it just happened’ or ‘we drifted together’. Contrary to popular images of uncontrollable romantic passion, love here is everyday: it is an emotion that creeps up on you or develops gradually. Since there is now a common understanding of there being a love dichotomy: lust/love, romantic/companionate, falling in love/being in love with longevity associated with the second in the dichotomy, it is perhaps unsurprising that those in long-term relationships characterise their love as mundane or secular rather than profane.

In many places in her book on love, Evans notes that love cannot be defined: ‘it is a sentiment separate from social meaning and action’ (Evans 2003:105). Yet as Jackson (1999) notes, felt emotions are inaccessible to us to study – there is no way for us to understand feelings of love except through studying the ways in which love is talked and written about. Thus, there is a difference between love as the felt emotion and concepts of love, which are used in numerous and varied ways. For example, when love is invoked in public life it is often done to rationalise or excuse otherwise unacceptable and often deceitful behaviours (in particular extra-marital affairs and especially popular for male transgressors since it is only men who are able to act honourably and dishonourably; see Evans 2003:95). This demonstrates the power inherent in invoking the concept of love- it is considered outside of reality, indescribable, but capable of justifying behaviours which break accepted social rules. In the West and over time, love has come to be associated with modernity, marriage, and romance (although its roots clearly extend beyond all of these). The ‘love’ imagined today is one which combines explicit sexual desire with shared secular interests and forms the basis for relationships formalised through marriage or civil partnership (Evans 2003).

Love is an emotion

The status of love as an emotion has been debated with arguments both for and against including it within the realm of emotions.¹ What Diane H. Felmlee and Susan Sprecher (2006) note however, is that regardless of the academic and scholarly debates about the standing of love, it is widely believed throughout societies to be an emotion and to be comprised of emotional elements. Not only is love believed to be an emotion, studies find that it is seen to represent one

of the best examples of an emotion in everyday understandings. Thus regardless of whether love is ‘really’ an emotion, as the authors note, ‘it is clear that love is a central aspect of the emotional backdrop of social interaction’ (Felmlee and Sprecher 2006:393).

Seebach and Núñez-Mosteo (among many others including Carter 2013) found in their research a universal absence of spontaneous love definitions. What was described, however, was an assumption that we all have a shared understanding of love even if this is not always shared once particular experiences were revealed to others. Love was often defined by their participants through personal experiences, shared practices (e.g. eyes meeting across a crowded room), or in reference to cultural objects or artefacts (such as films or books). The authors note that this indicates the different understandings of love as something experienced and as something represented through cultural imageries. Moreover, the ways in which these understandings are invoked relies to some degree on the person’s biographical experiences- in particular their own relationship history: ‘those in a romantic love relationship rather opted for defining romantic love via a concrete personal experience whilst those who were not defined romantic love rather through a culturally fixed image’ (Seebach and Núñez-Mosteo 2016:4). In response to the general question ‘what is love?’, the authors derived four aspects of romantic love (Seebach and Núñez-Mosteo 2016 4-5):

1. A feeling felt through experience within a culture
2. A social practice linking partners together
3. An ideal reflected in the relationship stories (and ideals) produced by couples
4. A social institution or bond, creating durable relationships.

In the first aspect, the emotion of love is always associated also with a practice of love – a touch or kiss and so on. These special moments were often drawn upon when participants were asked to describe love. These findings also reflect those by Jacqui Gabb and Janet Fink (2015) who describe the importance of the everyday ‘doing’ of relationships to people’s understandings of love: the mundane task of making your partner a cup of tea was frequently highlighted as an important indication of love and intimacy (see also Weeks 2007). As Arlie R. Hochschild (1987) and Eva Illouz (2009) have noted before, emotions are central to the synthesis of social action and individual experience. Or as Wendy Langford put it: falling in love ‘constitutes a personal and social revolution’ (Langford 1999:24).

In this sense, love is a typical emotion. However, Seebach and Núñez-Mosteo suggest that love is also different: it demands reciprocity and symmetry of experience and feeling (although this does not imply equality). This reciprocity of love ‘creates a circle in which the two

individuals move from an individual to a social level and backwards engaging always closer and tighter' (Seebach and Núñez-Mosteo 2016:6). The linking of individuals through this emotion, bridging the gap between feelings, social emotion, and ties, is what makes the emotion of love stand out as different from others.

Love is social

While love may well be an emotion then, it is also social. Emotions are social practices organised, as some argue, through stories that we tell and enact (Jackson 1999). Seebach and Núñez-Mosteo (2016) agree, finding that couples create stories of their own love relationships as their ideal love stories, bestowing their love lives and everyday relationships with meaning and a higher purpose. For Stevi Jackson, love is clearly both a social phenomenon and an individual feeling, for the 'idea of romantic love would have little effect if it did not have some resonance for individuals, did not make sense in terms of our felt emotional states and personal relationships' (Jackson 1999:97). Nevertheless, love cannot be treated as simply 'an emotion' as something that occurs outside and independent of the social and cultural context in which it occurs. Emotions are not pre-social and emotions are subject to both individual and social management (Hochschild 1983). For Jackson then, in a discussion of love we must take seriously both the social and cultural conventions which surround it as well as the subjective experience of the emotion.

Thus, love is shaped by social and cultural processes; processes in which we actively participate to create a sense for ourselves of our emotions, and what they mean – what love is. We do this by 'learning scripts, positioning ourselves within discourses, constructing narratives of self' (Jackson 1999:107). A set of discourses about love pre-exist us as individuals and it is by positioning ourselves in relation to these existing discourses that we come to understand love and to make sense of our feelings. Thus love is an emotion but only because it already exists as a social discourse which allows us to interpret subjective feelings through the lens of 'love'. This explanation helps to explain why such a 'unique', inexplicable, and personal experience such as love can follow rather uniform and culturally prescribed patterns: 'tradition supplies us with narrative forms with which we begin to be familiarized in childhood and through which we learn what love is' (Jackson 1999:108). For Hochschild (1983) such narratives constitute an emotion culture which supply us with cultural scripts guiding appropriate emotional responses in varied situations. These are strategic performances and very often are not pleasurable (her example is airline stewards but we may consider the bride who regrets her decision on her wedding day nevertheless performing appropriate love and happiness). Emotion ideologies are acquired throughout life and important life-course events,

supplying individuals with a repertoire of 'feeling rules' within the emotion culture. These 'feeling rules' specify what emotion a person should feel as well as the intensity of the emotion, its direction, and duration.

While Jackson and Hochschild point out the gender inequalities inherent in love scripts, there have been some suggestions that love is becoming more equal. Anthony Giddens (1991, 1992) sees current society embracing 'confluent love' which involves 'opening oneself out to the other' (Giddens 1992:61). This is an active and contingent love that is always in flux and 'presumes equality in emotional give and take' (Giddens 1992:62). Confluent love clashes with a romantic discourse that, according to Giddens, requires a one-and-only and forever quality to the relationship. Confluent love succeeds however, on the basis that people have individualised desires, and will only remain together for as long as satisfaction lasts. Using a similar evidence-base to Giddens, but reaching different conclusions, David Shumway (2003) notes that cultural scripts have moved away from love towards intimacy with couples directed to aspire to properly 'intimate' relationships. While Shumway suggests that intimacy has not been fully permeated by market values yet, it still offers only a private, individualised refuge from social fragmentation. Thus, the mismatch between individual expectations of coupledness and the reality of relating with one intimate other will continue.

Also recognising the impact of market logics on intimacy, Zygmunt Bauman in several of his writings points to deregulation and privatisation as cornerstones in the changes inflicted upon love and sex (Bauman 1997, 1999, 2003). Along with Giddens and Shumway, Bauman sees love and intimacy as private concerns, freed from the constraints of moral or social regulation. Rather than leading to democratisation or a refuge from society, however, Bauman sees the focus on consuming pleasure as a powerful instrument of a marketised society where sex is something to be feared within social settings, and sexual freedom is loosening the stable foundations of the family. Alongside sexual exclusivity, long-term love and commitment are out of fashion and have been replaced by temporary liaisons, short flings and one-night stands. However, the cultural promise of eternal love defies this impermanence, leading to 'a source of incurable anxiety, though perhaps an anxiety deeper still for being soaked through with the premonition of failure ... the eternity of love and of the beloved is culture's saving lie, helping to assimilate what in fact defies comprehension' (Bauman 1999:25). Eternal love defies comprehension because it has been separated from its foundations in sex and eroticism. Love is now free-floating, not connected to family, parenting and marriage but instead to another person, to their body. As bodies are not eternal, neither can be the love for them.

Much of Bauman's argument can be contested, however. Many writers, for example, have pointed towards the continued value placed on love, intimacy, commitment and marriage by

couples, with love offering more than a private, contingent refuge devoid of normative regulation (see, e.g., Carter 2012; Lewis 2001; Smart 2007). Love is more than an instrument of a deregulated and privatised postmodern society, replacing morality; it could, in fact be a key component in providing a new framework for contemporary ethics (see discussion below). Temporary flings have not replaced a desire for marriage or at least long-term commitment, despite the growing use of dating apps in contemporary Western societies. Indeed, many individuals use such apps in order to find lasting commitment (Palmer 2020; van Hooff 2020). Yet inequalities remain an inherent part of love and intimacy (e.g. Jamieson 1998). Despite accounts of democratising love (Giddens 1992) or struggles for love replacing class struggles (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995), love continues to operate through inequality, working differently for men and women and taking on different meanings when taken outside of the white, middle-class, urban context (see, e.g., Langford 1999; Evans 2003; Charsley 2008; Twamley 2013; Chantler 2014).

Love is rational

In response to the vision of love outlined by Bauman above, Mary Evans (2003) calls for a rejection of ‘romance’ as peddled by Western culture and capitalist industry, instead appealing to a rational conceptualisation of the emotion. For Evans hope is presented by the model of love in Jane Austen: the exchange of rational discourse and exercise of rational decision-making in selecting a romantic partner, coupled with a complete rejection of romanticised and commercialised love. As Evans points out, we are living with a paradox of love where we need it more and more in an increasingly bureaucratised society but in circumstances which detract from its realisation – in other words we have higher and higher expectations of a love that is increasingly selfish. Thus, ‘[r]ather than regarding the rational as the cold and uncaring enemy of love, we might well regard it as its only true defender in a social world awash with deadly cocktails of romance, hedonism and personal entitlement’ (Evans 2003:143).

Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (1995, 2002) suggest that as (Western) society is now ‘detraditionalized, non-religious and individualized’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995:168), love is a blank space that couples themselves can fill in. Therefore, directed by ‘the lyrics of pop songs, advertisements, pornographic scripts, light fiction’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995:5), love becomes central in providing life with meaning. Love is now always disorderly and chaotic because it can and does have different meaning from person to person. Unlike Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) who consider this the ‘normal chaos’ of love, Evans (2003) argues that, on the contrary, love is a highly defined emotion in contemporary society, filled with meaning from the highly individualised and sexualised market economy. For Evans,

it is not love which has become chaotic but the morality surrounding love and sexuality. Indeed, Evans suggests that our expectations and experiences of love are actually highly predictable, following the ‘ancient pattern’ of: ‘expectation, anticipation, achievement and varying degrees of disappointment or delight’ (Evans 2003:55). However, since the separation of love from sexuality and sex from marriage, new possibilities have opened up regarding acceptable sexual and love moralities. Thus ‘the internal personal satisfactions of marriage (or relationships) have become the criteria for its continuation rather than any structural constraints’ (Evans 2003:55).

This echoes Illouz’s account of why love hurts in contemporary ‘Western’ societies. Both Illouz and Evans use the works of Jane Austen to track and trace the development of our understandings about love, commitment, morality, and marriage from the British Regency era to today, although they reach slightly different conclusions. For Evans the writings of Austen present a vision of hope for extracting ourselves from the current doomed project of love, romance and capitalism, where love is solely predicated on a shaky vision of romance bought and exchanged. The rational approach to love and relating described by Austen, and today written out by romance, provides a much-needed antidote. For Illouz, however, Austen’s account simply demonstrates what has been lost in contemporary relating – the wider community of moral judgement providing a context for relational marital decision-making. In other words, Austen’s work shows how far the ecology and architecture of choice has changed today. This distinction is discussed further below.

Love, morality, and marriage

Evans (2003) points out that the irony of modern love is that it is considered essential for marriage and yet it is also that which destroys marriage (in contemporary ‘love-marriages’). Without recognising the limits of ‘romance’ or romantic love, too much is expected from it, destabilising its foundations. And yet as Evans also points out, it is for Western societies generally, ‘a sign of superiority of our culture that we do not associate marriage with explicitly material or social convenience’ and instead expect that love alone will produce lasting ties (Evans 2003:21). The approach in the United Kingdom to marriage immigration and the persistent public confusion around ‘sham’, ‘arranged’ and ‘forced’ marriage are indications of this (Chantler 2014; Andrikopoulos 2021). Moreover, as Apostolos Andrikopoulos (2021) notes, the notion that love and material interest or convenience are, or should be, totally separate is misleading at best, and damaging for women at worst. Material interest, convenience, rationality, reason, and pragmatism are all central components of intimacy and love, but perhaps not romance.

Thus love is not just an emotion, it creates and is a basis for relationships of interest, encompassing material concerns and rationality. These ‘external’ components of love may well provide a degree of commitment that constrains or reinforces relationships, promoting durability and stability (Carter 2012). For, while some argue that love is more fragile, insecure, and unstable now, others find that its durability over time, a sense of security, and providing a future were key features of the emotion (Seebach and Núñez-Mosteo 2016). This is something I have also found in my own work with young women in discussing marriage and with those in relationships where they are living apart from a partner (‘living apart together’ or LAT). For many people, while defining love is almost impossible, it is much easier to discuss the pragmatic elements of relationships including commitment and what keeps a couple together. Thus, alongside love, young women valued sexual exclusivity, relationship longevity, moral and social expectations, and relationship investments (such as shared housing, finances, or children) in intimate partnerships. These, together with love, created the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ required to remain within a relationship (Carter 2012).

Even where one of these elements was missing – the investment of shared co-residency – for many of those in LAT relationships, expressed love and commitment to a relationship was still very high. Again, love was not very often directly discussed (as in Carter 2013), but it emerged in accounts when talking about more pragmatic concerns such as commitment. In this case love was very much separate from marriage (although not everyone who was LAT was unmarried, still, married LAT is fairly uncommon), with it instead being associated with contact, care and commitment (which sometimes included shared investments such as finances and intimacy). From the data discussed so far, the idea that love alone should produce a lasting relationship is far from the lived reality of relationships.

In separating love from marriage, love now can be utilised to legitimate a far wider variety of intimate relationships (such as LAT but also inter-ethnic, same-sex, or age-dissimilar couples). Lara McKenzie (2015) in her work on age-dissimilar couples (with an age gap of several years or more) points out that when required to justify a relationship (in a way that age-normative romantic couples are not), certain aspects are especially highlighted, such as free choice, compatibility, or similarity. Moreover, love relationships were seen as containing and resolving the contradictory desires of lastingness and fulfilment by participants using a conception of love that does not end; relationships that ended were not ‘love’ relationships at all. Thus, contra Zygmunt Bauman, an enduring transcendent quality of romantic love is revealed: as being eternal and able to conquer all obstacles. While this aspect of love is arguably in decline, its use in legitimising and providing legal justification for marginalised relationships is, if anything, strengthening. Same-sex couples have been granted legal rights to marriage in

many countries on the basis of 'love'. In this way romantic love has become a (global) legitimating ideology, increasingly used as a means to promote and protect (and regulate) diverse forms of family life.

The way in which this love ideology is interpreted and incorporated into subjectivities, however, varies considerably. Katherine Twamley (2013, 2014) for example, who conducted comparative research with Gujarati Indians born in the United Kingdom and India found that while romantic love was valued by both groups, the form of this love and the resultant marriages differed according to context. In both India and the United Kingdom, love is considered a necessity for marriage, although in the UK-born group, love is expected to exist before marriage while in the Indian-born group, love would grow within an arranged marriage. In the latter group, participants were fulfilling family and filial obligations while appealing to Western discourses of love, while the UK-born group downplayed the arranged elements of their marriages, emphasising love instead.

Yet, while love may be the ideal basis for marriage in the UK, this does not mean that this 'love' is devoid of the practical considerations more commonly associated with arranged marriage. Khatidja Chantler (2014) notes there is just as much strategizing in 'love' marriages as there is love in 'arranged' marriages, especially regarding finances, shared residency, children, care, legal provisions and so on. Chantler uses the examples of dating websites, and we might easily add here dating apps, which use the equivalent of the 'biodata' frequently used in setting up arranged marriage meetings. The content of this data might vary between the biodata (which may ask for religion, language, ethnic community, occupation, and siblings) and data app profile (which may include age, passions, and plenty of photos), but the point of the data – to use as a means by which to include or exclude potential partners – remains the same. The reasoning behind arranged marriage (to find compatible partners who match in terms of interests, class, ethnicity, religion, background and so on) and dating apps is very similar – both are forms of algorithmic matching. However, the dominance of the romantic love narrative and the idea that this should include no reason, rationality or calculation is persistent and pernicious. It informs immigration policy so that acceptable marriages are only those which appear spontaneous – based on Western concepts of freedom and love – rather than calculated. Intimacy and marriage across borders is therefore, policed through dominant notions of Western love and romance (Chantler 2014; Andrikopoulos 2021).

Love clearly continues to operate at a level of morality, whether this is reflected in desiring an arranged marriage to fulfil familial obligation or in the policing of the borders of intimacy. For many Western writers on love and intimacy, it is this morality which has seen a decline in recent decades, whether this is a decline in family obligations or 'oughts' (Lewis

2001), moral-regulatory traditions (Gross 2005) or moral communities (Illouz 2012). This is despite a continued emphasis from others on the importance of morality in family matters (e.g. McCarthy, Edwards and Gillies 2000; Turner and Almack 2019), especially regarding the parent-child relationship. Morality, or a sense of 'ought', has been a persistent theme throughout my own research. In some cases, this was a sense of feeling obliged to marry before having children (Carter 2017), in others it was continuing to live apart because of existing caring obligations to other family members (Carter et al. 2016). There were strong views about the morality of sexual exclusivity which was, for everyone, a moral absolute (Carter 2012). Once again, this belies the common assumption that strong individualism and personal autonomy underlie contemporary Western love relationships and marriage in Britain. Love and commitment both are infused with a sense of permanence that is at once emotional (we *want* to stay together), material (we *need* to stay together), and moral (we *ought* to stay together).

Why does love matter now?

This section focuses in more detail on two contemporary theorists of love: Eva Illouz (2007, 2012) and Swen Seebach (2016, 2017). Both in different ways draw attention to the importance of love now, whether as a doomed life project or as a new moral order. We start out with Illouz. In *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism* (2007), Illouz suggests that while emotion is not action, it is energy which propels us towards action. Countering Jackson (1999) and others, rather than being pre-social or pre-cultural, 'emotions are cultural meanings and social relationships that are inseparably compressed together and it is this compression which confers on them their capacity to energize action' (Illouz 2007:3). Emotions are, however, more social than psychological, they are 'pre-reflexive, often semi-conscious' (Illouz 2007:3). For Illouz action and emotion are inseparable and it is necessary to understand the emotion behind actions to fully comprehend action. Building on her earlier work in *Consuming the Romantic Utopia* (1997), in *Cold Intimacies* Illouz sets out her thesis that the market and emotions have become inseparable: with emotions infiltrating the marketplace irretrievably and the marketplace now dominating the field of emotions. As Illouz (2007:5) puts it: 'market-based cultural repertoires shape and inform interpersonal and emotional relationships, while interpersonal relationships are at the epicentre of economic relationships'.

In the economic marketplace, emotions are now an important part of every interaction-between workers, clients, customers and so on (a legacy inspired by Hochschild 1983, 2003). Emotional life and intimate relationships follow the logic and transactional values of economic relations, with emotions increasingly becoming subject to evaluation and measurement for 'quality'. Illouz notes that the rationalisation of the self has led to a standardising of the scripts

of intimacy which are more and more influenced by the language of the market (e.g. marriage markets). This in turn weakens the capacity for intimacy and closeness, for it is increasingly difficult to shift between strategic scripts and emotional ones. For Illouz, this interrelating and inter-shaping of emotional and economic relationships defines modern modes of intimacy, termed ‘emotional capitalism’. The emotional self is now a public being, performing rationalised scripts in fixed contexts, such as the family.

In her later work *Why Love Hurts* (2012), Illouz expands upon the cooling of intimacy theory and in particular, the infiltration of market logics into the emotional sphere. Here, following Bauman, Illouz is coolly endorsing modernity by explaining how modern choice and freedom can be understood through looking at modern love and suffering. Due to changes in the architecture and ecology of choice (reflexivity and social conditions), modern marriage markets, commitment, gender relations and so on, we have more choice in love now but that has led to greater suffering because we have less certainty and security in those choices. More choices, open sexual fields and wider marriage markets mean that there is the chance that there is always someone better out there. Decisions are now based upon rational, economic balances rather than romantic visions of all-encompassing love.

In the past, Illouz argues, love was ritualised and followed a ‘proper’ sequence where: ‘emotion confirms commitment as much as commitment confirms emotion’ (Illouz 2012:30). Decisions about marriages were made with love as a consideration alongside status, family connections and wider communities – who also provided a moral framework for decision-making. She argues that this process contrasts with the contemporary regime of emotional authenticity where wider moral (and real physical) communities have fragmented. Actors now must know their feelings, act on these, reveal them to the intimate other, and this alone must be the foundations of an intimate relationship (Illouz 2012:31). This emotional ‘authenticity’ underpins contemporary marriage and becomes fundamental to an individual’s sense of self and worth. Yet it is a love that is disembedded from social frameworks and a community who in the past, would have guided and watched-over marriage decisions. This free-floating, fragile love is now all the more important – valorised – in providing sources of recognition of the self from others. Yet while love is the only acceptable foundation for contemporary relationships, given the infiltration of rationality into intimacy (and vice versa), we are all also engaged in rational and economic decision-making.

For Illouz, what is properly modern about romantic love is that the self and the other are intertwined through the need for recognition and self-worth, thus a flaw in one is a flaw for both. The insecurity of self-worth and need for recognition from another are made more important because of the lack of alternative cultural frameworks to establish self-worth (Illouz

2012: 130). We are so dependent upon love for giving us a sense of importance and being that any defect in the object of love, or an absence of love, undermines our ontology – our very idea of being. For Illouz, there are no alternative cultural scripts to provide us with a sense of being in contemporary society, other than love. This places a significant burden on love, and one which is ultimately unfulfilled since relationships (and ideas about self-worth) cannot rest alone on such a fragile concept. This is a similar conclusion to that drawn by Bauman (2003) and others.

Emma Engdahl (2018), for example, writes that love now represents a social pathology: love and depression come as a package and one that is desired in contemporary Western capitalist societies, despite the resultant suffering. For Engdahl, the connection between love and depression is inevitable and unavoidable since both loving and not loving can lead to feeling depressed. Thus, ‘depression could be perceived as a kind of love pathology that has arisen from the failed struggle of finding, or keeping, love’ (Engdahl 2018:6). According to Engdahl, depressive love happens when we abandon the struggle for recognition in and with another; with modern conceptions of the self, identity and the other, we can only recognise and be authentic with ourselves, not with another. This realisation and lack of connection causes love to become a social pathology and results in people feeling and experiencing consecutive depressive states. Love is a powerful thing if it allows us to lose our very sense of self.

What this discussion seems to miss, however, is that while emotions and suffering do constitute an important and inescapable part of intimate relating, there are also other elements, including traditional forms of commitment, which are not simply dependent upon emotional give-and-take, authenticity or mutual recognition (Carter 2012; Carter and Duncan 2018). Having children is an example of this; children still form a significant moral and external commitment which has nothing to do with the emotional authenticity of the couple (Finch and Mason 1993; McCarthy, Edwards and Gillies 2000). Moreover, drawing a distinction between ‘stable’ relationships of the past compared to ‘unstable’ relationships today creates a false dichotomy, for, as Evans notes, ‘the stable life we assume in the past was as much disrupted by death, migration and poverty as contemporary family life is by divorce’ (Evans 2003:49-50). In addition, Evans (pre-emptively) calls into question the opening-up of marriage markets. In comparing marriages in the time of Austen with the time at which she was writing (a comparison also utilised by Illouz), Evans observes that ‘marriages, then as now, took place *not* across class and ethnic differences, but largely *within* them’ (Evans 2003:37). The rationality of contemporary relationships, rather than providing the balm or solution to the ‘problem’ of romance, as indicated by Evans (2003), for Illouz is the ultimate downfall of love.

How then to reconcile this apparent conflict between rationality/reason and love? Swen Seebach may suggest that both these understandings of love, and the connections posed between reason and love, are limited. Indeed, both Evans and Illouz are somewhat vague when it comes to defining love, which may be why they end up with such contradictory conclusions. In 2016, Seebach and Núñez-Mosteo debated whether love is a linking emotion and conclude that while love is an emotion which links a couple together, producing a link above and beyond the couple which cannot be reduced to its parts, love is also more than this. Love is an emotion, a bond, a two-sided ideal and an institution (it provides its own meanings, norms and rules). Love is reciprocal, social and individual: it is both means and end to action and interaction. Love is not *just* a linking emotion (like shame), it is much more.

In his later work, Seebach (2017) expands on this theory of love. Drawing upon the work of Georg Simmel (1984), Seebach suggests that love is the new framework upon which morality is built in contemporary Western societies. In its scattered and fragmented cultural and social forms, love is made sense of by individuals in religious terms – thus love becomes taboo to define because of its ‘quasi-sacred’ status. But this is not the religion in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s (1995) terms where love provides a private god or point of worship but no moral or sacred content. On the contrary, for Seebach love creates durability and stability in relationships because rather than being an empty category or fleeting emotion, love provides a ‘morality of the self’. This means (following Simmel) that we locate our moral limits, identity, and future within ourselves. Rather than leading to an over-emphasis on ‘authenticity’ (as in Illouz 2012) or strong individualism (as in Giddens 1992 and Bauman 2003), however, couples can experience ‘a deep form of being free and authentic whilst engaging in a durable social relationship’ (Seebach 2017:109).

Seebach reaches such different conclusions to Illouz, he suggests, because of Illouz’s focus on the search for a partner rather than what happens once love and longevity has been established. This focus gives the false impression that love can only exist for individuals in a process of becoming or vanishing, rather than continuing between two partners. This turns love into an individual act of choice and imagination. What this misses is the desire of individuals to limit their choices, to ‘reduce the complexity of the future’ (Seebach 2017:52), or to decide to ‘commit in the face of choice’ (Carter and Smith 2020:74). As I have argued elsewhere, the ‘highest value of romantic life is the decision to cut off all other choices in an ecology where choice is defined primarily by individual, emotional and rational reflexivity’ (Carter 2020:74). Thus, the choice to stay in a relationship (or to commit to an unknown) is the ultimate act of freedom. Illouz misses the social and moral qualities of love which emerge when experienced

in durable relationships and produce the very elements which promote such longevity- the desire to limit choice.

Thus rationality and love are intertwined but not in a limiting way (where rationality is either the death of love or its saviour). Love, in its enduring form, is both the means and end to reason. As Seebach puts it: ‘As an end to individual choice and an aim to life, as a socialising element in a society of individuality, as a place for the realisation of the self and one’s future in society, the love relationship had become an answer to the creation of durable social bonds in a society without divine rules or a collective horizon of meaning’ (Seebach 2017:99). At a time when social regulation was de-institutionalising, love made sociability possible and facilitated a new morality. Within this new morality, couples stay together, not because they are required to but because they believe it to be right – because they ‘ought’ to. And this moral code extends beyond the confines of intimacy and kinship to inform a wider social morality. In this way, society is held together by a morality of love which ‘establishes a form of looking at the world that sets the criteria for right and wrong on the basis of that special singular bond’ (Seebach 2017:194); this is a post-individual morality, agreed through empathy and reason. Weddings, marriage, and other love rituals are key to spreading and sharing this moral social order, uniting emotions at the collective level and cementing society’s belief in love.

Conclusion

To conclude this chapter’s discussion of the topic of love, while it is evident that love is indeed an emotion and an emotional experience encompassing suffering, depression and anxiety, love is also far more than an emotion. Love is different from other emotions in the way it demands reciprocity and creates a link between the lover and the beloved. Thus, love is also social, it is produced within a culture, requires cultural scripts to make sense of it, and is central in the construction and continuation of social inequalities. While seemingly in chaos, love can actually reflect very rational approaches to coupling, including material concerns, practices of care and financial considerations. Encompassed within these rational and practical elements is a sense of morality, not in decline as other have suggested, but rather reimagined so that a sense of what ‘ought’ to be done to oneself and to others in intimate and familial relationships is a primary concern of contemporary individuals. While market logics have no doubt entered the language and practice of everyday intimacy, and dating apps have become commonplace, this does not preclude the search for enduring love, an eternal love. As we have seen in the chapter, individuals and couples are skilled at reconciling contradictions of love, not least in the search for a sense of moral authority.

Having read and re-read through the literature on love and society and revisiting my own research on love, I am persuaded by Swen Seebach's argument for love as a (the?) master emotion. Previous theoretical expositions of love – 'confluent love', 'distant love', 'cold love', 'liquid love' and so on – always appeared partial and to miss something of the experience of love as encapsulated by Stevi Jackson's observation in 1993 and 1999 ('Even Sociologists Fall in Love'). Morality is a fundamental component of love whether it is considerations of sexual exclusivity, care for children and others, social and parental expectations, religious and ethnic obligations, or a commitment to love and another. These ways of expressing the morality of love indicate the operation of both the 'morality of the self' and the wider moral code implicated by love – a form of looking at the world and determining what is right and wrong. In subjective experiences of love as described in my own research and the work of others, love is a personal and social emotion, practice and experience. But above and beyond this, love provides a set of guiding principles by which to live well and it provides the resolution to life's eternal choices.

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Notes

¹ For details of this debate, see Felmlee and Sprecher (2006).