Love

A Question for Feminism in the Twenty-First Century

Edited by

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7 Loving Him for Who He Is
The Microsociology of Power

Lena Gunnarsson

In contemporary western welfare societies power asymmetries based on gender are not legitimate. Yet, ideological and judicial norms of gender equality co-exist quite harmoniously with a persisting reality of gender inequality, even in the Nordic countries ruled by strong norms of equality. Heterosexual coupledom is perhaps the site where this contradiction is most marked. In western societies the forming of heterosexual couples is generally based on individual choice motivated by the mutual experience of love. Not surprisingly, this historically specific grounding of intimacy in intimacy alone has given rise to optimistic accounts of democratized love. If being together is entirely a matter of the rewards each of the parties experiences from this being together, then, Anthony Giddens (1992) famously argues, the lack of equality will motivate the less profiting party to end the relationship. Nonetheless, empirical research shows that the increasing lack of external impetuses for staying in relationships is not a sufficient condition for equal negotiating power within the relationship (e.g. Dempsey 2002; Dryden 1999; Duncombe and Marsden 1993; Holmberg 1995; Jamieson 1999; Langford 1994, 1999; Strazdins and Broom 2004). The most poignant expression of the poor realization of norms of equal intimacy is the wide occurrence of violence in relations whose raison d'être is supposed to be love and where there are no significant economic obstacles forcing women to stay.

In this chapter I theorize the tension inherent in contemporary western heterosexual love between, on one hand, norms of equality and freedom to choose and, on the other, persisting inequality. A point of departure is that in a context of an ideology of gender equality experiences of inequality ought to be largely incompatible with the experience of loving and being loved, such that when asymmetries prevail there must be mechanisms making them appear legitimate if love is to survive. My focus is not the kind of outright abuse to which most people would object, but the normalized asymmetrical tendencies constitutive of contemporary western heterosexual love. Physical violence and other forms of obvious abuse can be seen as enabled by these more general tendencies though. Nor will my focus be the unequal structuring of tasks *connected* to the practice of heterosexual

love, such as childcare and housework, but on the love interactions as such. Anna G. Jónasdóttir (1994, 2009, 2011; Gunnarsson 2011b, 2013, forthcoming 2014) argues that the very practices of love, including both care and erotic ecstasy, should be seen as the crucial site of struggle between the sexes in contemporary western societies. She contends that the dominant mode of organizing relations of care and erotic ecstasy in societies based on formal gender equality and women's relative socioeconomic independence is one in which men exploit women's *love power*. Love power is the basic human capacity by means of which we empower each other as persons, entailing that we *need* to love and be loved if we are to flourish as persons. While men's exploitation of women's love produces a kind of male "surplus worthiness" (1994: 227), lending to them a structurally produced authority, for most women the consequence of this process is "a continuous struggle on the boundaries of 'poverty' in terms of their possibilities to operate in society as self-assured and self-evidently worthy people exerting their capacities effectively and legitimately" (225). Empirical studies confirm that power is not something going on outside of love, but part and parcel of love itself (e.g. Haavind 1984, 1985; Holmberg 1995; Langford 1994, 1999). Simply put, they show that women tend to give more love to men than men to women, if we by "giving love" mean recognizing and affirming, in practice, the other person and her/his needs and goals as valuable in their own right, in a way not directed by one's own needs and goals (cf. Djikic and Oatley 2004; Jónasdóttir 1994, 2009, 2011). This definition captures the care rather than erotic aspect of love and it is this care dimension that constitutes the focus here. A more "operationalized" way of describing this gendered pattern of caring would be that women tend to adapt more to men than vice versa.

How, I ask, *does it come about that women tend to give more love to men than men give to women when mutual love is (supposed to be) the very raison d'être of the relationship, when the ideological context prescribes gender equality and when there are no salient external factors that stop women from breaking up in case they are not satisfied?*

My analysis sets off with an assessment of Carin Holmberg's (1995) study on heterosexual coupledom, with a specific focus on her analysis of the couple interactions in terms of *asymmetrical role-taking*. The study is based on individual interviews with the parties of ten Swedish childless heterosexual couples who are perceived by others and themselves as equal. I also draw on Wendy Langford's study based on interviews with 15 heterosexual women about love (1999), whose findings share considerable similarities with Holmberg's. Rather than invoking the studies as "evidence" for my analytical framework, my purpose is to demonstrate how the latter can help make sense of the empirical data. I then extend the analysis by developing a conceptualization of the link between gender identity and the gendered tendencies of loving, by examining the mediating role of expectations and gratitude and highlighting the importance of

distinguishing between the subjective experience of love and the objective practice of love. Lastly, I show how the tension between being "loved" for conforming to femininity and being loved for one's own sake produces different kinds of risks and possibilities depending on which strategy women choose as a means of satisfying their need for love.

ASYMMETRICAL ROLE-TAKING: OR "LOVING HIM FOR WHO HE IS"

If "giving love" means actively caring for the needs of another person in a way not directed by one's own needs, it is analytically fruitful to look closer at instances of conflict between the needs and wishes of two lovers. Insofar as we are distinct persons, caring for the needs of others sometimes contradicts concern for our own needs. When the love that is the very raison d'être of the relationship is challenged by such conflicts, the ways that women and men take part in saving the experience of love from this threat can reveal the underlying structures of the relationship.

Holmberg argues that identifying patterns of *role-taking* can reveal what kind of power structures are at work in human interaction. Role-taking is a symbolic interactionist concept denoting the activity of taking the perspective of the other, to put it simply. Given that we let the perspective of the other inform our practice, I would argue that—expressed in role theoretical terms—role-taking is the essence of mature love. A central finding in Holmberg's study is a gendered pattern of *asymmetrical role-taking*. While the women tend to see situations from the man's perspective while relativizing their own, the men tend to take their own perspective as the neutral ground from the point of view of which the woman's standpoint is judged. It is not that the women's subjectivity is totally effaced; after all, the couples in Holmberg's study invested in gender equality. Still, when the women express dissatisfaction with their partner's behavior they tend to see this dissatisfaction as a subjective standpoint that is relative to the more absolute standpoint of the man. They may not like what he does, but "that's how he is." From one point of view this may seem like something we could expect from our lover, to be accepted for who we are. Yet, the "right" of these men to be loved for "who they are" is premised on the withdrawing of this possibility for the women. In order for the man to be the way he "is," the woman has to follow.

Even when they are aware that their partners do not like their behavior, the men in Holmberg's study often legitimize their adhering to this behavior by referring back to their own standpoint. One of them says he knows his partner appreciates when he buys her flowers or tells her she looks good; yet, he rarely does this because "it is not important for him" (1995: 131; cf. Thagaard 1997).[1] Similarly, one man says he is "not much into talking," that he talks only when he "has got something to say" and Holmberg notes

that whether his partner wants to talk does not seem to be anything he thinks about. He even states that he expects her "not to talk to him about things that he finds uninteresting or tiring" (144). Although the female interviewees are generally more interested in talking to their partners, it is telling that one of the few who is not, has tried to change in order to adapt to her partner's wish. Although "she finds it hard to discuss certain problems she has learnt to" (145).

The male tendency to legitimize their non-adaptation by referring to what is important to themselves or to what they are like is often supported by the women. Although they reveal frustration with their partners' unwillingness to talk, they often use statements such as "he is a silent person" or "he is not very interested in talking" (145) in an accepting, or perhaps resigned, manner (cf. Strazdins and Broom 2004). The limits set by the men tend to be seen as absolute features intrinsic to their personalities and the far-reaching *understanding* that the women practice in respect to their partners is underpinned by a playing down of their own needs and wishes. Holmberg notes that "[s]he does not see that she attributes a more stable and unchangeable status to his 'personality' while her own seems possible to change. Although it is in her 'nature' to want to talk she can subordinate herself to his 'nature' of not wanting to" (150).

An implication of the women's tendency to identify with the man's view, even when it disqualifies their own, is that they often regard their own standpoint as invalid. For example, although many women express frustration with their partner's lack of response, they tend to see their own behavior as its cause. One woman says she "understands if he doesn't listen to her" and concedes that she "often talks about things that are unimportant and uninteresting" (147). The common male opinion that their partner is illegitimately *demanding* is often shared by the women. For example, one of the women, who would like to hear more often from her partner that he loves her, robs this wish of its legitimacy by taking up her partner's standpoint. She says that "really, she knows he loves her so it is unnecessary wanting to hear it sometimes" (155). As Holmberg puts it, "[w]hen she holds her wish to be unnecessary she makes herself into a demanding person. It seems she thinks her demand is unreasonable [. . .]. Thereby she indirectly legitimizes his way of acting and diminishes herself and the wish she has" (155). This pattern is palpable also in Langford's study: "[The] construction of women's desire for attention as lacking in legitimacy was common in the data, sometimes associated with a corresponding sympathy for the man, who was seen as long-suffering" (1999: 67).

So what if the women's demands for attention *are* so overwhelming as to be deemed unreasonable by most people? In light of Jónasdóttir's thesis that most women are structurally impoverished of love, it should indeed be the case that women tend to be more desperate for love than men (Gunnarsson 2013, forthcoming 2014; cf. hooks 2000). *If* women express a desperate need for attention, it is thus more likely that it is a rational response to

a real lack of care rather than the result of some intrapsychic shortcoming. Moreover, men's tendency to see women's calls for approval as exaggerated must be seen in light of women's tendency to make sure men's needs for approval are satisfied (cf. Jack 1991: 59; Rubin 1983: 127). As Jean Duncombe and Dennis Marsden highlight, "men have powerful if unacknowledged needs of the emotion work that women perform for them" (1993: 236). In this way, men can live their lives under the illusion that they are not dependent on approval from their partners, thereby undermining sympathy for and identification with their partner's similar needs. As Holmberg observes: "He does not need to ask her for affirmation since she is actively giving him that. This may be a reason why he holds these ways of expressing love to be less important. He does not know what it means to be without them" (1995: 159).

ANGER AND ACCOUNTABILITY

When the women identify with the man's perspective at the cost of their own, this can be seen as a way of "resolving" a conflict between two persons by transferring it into the woman herself. However, occasionally the women in Holmberg and Langford's studies air their own standpoint more univocally, such that the conflict between them and their partner emerges more clearly. Yet, it seems difficult for the women to stick to their differing point of view when met by resistance from the men; then, the dynamic of male identification often reinserts itself. Just as both the women and men in Holmberg's study are prone to see the woman as "too demanding," the women often identify with their partner's view of them as "difficult and hysterical" (1995: 160). When the men get angry, contrarily, this appears as a legitimate and rational reaction; often men's anger is not even perceived as anger. One of the women in Langford's study tells about an incident in her marriage, when her husband wanted to have sex while she did not. When she explained to him why, his response was: "That's nothing but emotional crap" (1999: 97). As Langford argues, the man seemed to be blind to the fact that his own way of reacting was no less emotional than hers. Langford pinpoints the logic of this widespread dynamic: "men's accusations that women were 'irrational' implied a deviation from a norm which was assumed to be manifest in men's own point of view and which therefore, paradoxically, did not require examination or rational explanation" (1999: 96). The subjective nature of the man's standpoint is thus disguised. The normative structure underpinning this asymmetric way of demanding accountability resonates with a long history of feminist theorizing about Woman as the deviant, subjective Other, defined in relation to the allegedly gender-less, objective male centre (e.g. de Beauvoir 1989).

Yet, this structure cannot be reduced to a set of ideological notions. In my analysis, one reason why both the women and the men tend to see the

woman as the cause of their common conflicts is also that she is mostly the one putting problems on the agenda. Since, in the normal structure of asymmetrical role-taking, she already carries the conflicts within herself, the man will not experience that there is any problem—until the woman gives air to her subjectivity in an uncompromising manner. In this way, when the woman points to a conflict, this often appears as if she *causes* the conflict. Hence, as Holmberg notes, the strategy of "starting" a row is a double-edged sword:

> By quarrelling she shows that it is serious which leads them to talk to one another. On one hand she achieves what she really wanted, which was not to quarrel but to talk to him. On the other hand she is seen as 'the troublesome' or 'the hysterical' by him since she is the one starting the rows. (1995: 163; cf. Langford 1999: 95)

There is nothing objective about the notion that she is the cause of conflict, however; it is underpinned by flawed conceptions of causality, leading to unjust evaluations of whom to blame. The man does not see that the woman's dissatisfaction is something he is a part of creating; to him, it is *his* problem only in the sense of him undergoing it, not in the sense of his responsibility.

WOMEN AS TECHNICAL PROBLEMS

Holmberg sums up the logic underpinning asymmetrical role-taking:

> [H]er personality and demands are seen as relative to his personality and demands. These in a sense appear as absolute. She is the one expected to change her attitude to household work, to what their discussions should be about and to her wish to be courted. He, however: 'is like that,' 'does not think about that,' 'does not like talking' etc. He and his way of being just 'are.' She is 'the other' who should arrange herself according to what is possible to demand from him. (1995: 191)

Holmberg's concept of role-taking needs to be a bit more differentiated, however. Holmberg herself rightly notes that the men are often aware of their partner's standpoint (190), which they could not be unless they had somehow "taken" it. I would argue that this is actually mostly the case; the crucial point is that the man's tendency to delegitimize the woman's perspective causes a disjunction between his being informed about her standpoint and his feeling motivated to let this information influence him. It does not *move* him.

In my interpretation there is a lot of role-taking going on by the men in Holmberg's study. Whether we want it or not we are dependent on other people's wills, so even a person who is interested only in manipulatively pursuing his/her own egoistic interests, has to adapt to other people's agendas

in order to do exactly this. Michael Schwalbe's (1992) distinction between *analytical* and *receptive* role-taking is useful here. Schwalbe argues that the kind of role-taking that is constitutive of what he calls the "masculinist self" can be characterized as analytical. It implies "[dealing] with women as technical rather than moral problems," that is "in the ways necessary to overcome women's resistance as objects" (42). Receptive role-taking, contrarily, means to receive the other as subject, which involves *feeling with* the other so that "the facts of an other's feelings can become the facts of our own existence." "When we truly feel with the other," Schwalbe argues, "we are forced to reckon with the weight of the other's feelings as equal to our own. It is this, it seems, that men so often fail to do vis-à-vis women" (37).

The men in Holmberg's study often seem to experience themselves as somehow nonparticipating targets of the moods of their partner. This discloses a failure to *feel with* her; they do not emotionally identify with her so that her distress becomes theirs, thereby compelling them to take action. Instead, their role-taking seems to stretch only so far as to allow them to get rid of the troublesome situation they find themselves in by virtue of their relation to the woman standing before them. One man pictures two alternatives, when in a row with his partner: "say I'm sorry" or "let her have it her way" (1995: 168). The role-taking implied here is based on his understanding that she is angry with him and that if she is to become calm he must do something. His action is motivated not by care for the subjectivity of his partner, by a desire to make her feel good, but by the instrumental ambition to "overcome her resistance as object" since it stands in the way of his own well-being.

THE GENDERED MEDIATION OF LOVE: EXPECTATIONS AND GRATITUDE

How, then, do we explain the gendered tendency[2] outlined above? What is the causal link between a person's gender position and her/his way of role-taking, of loving and not loving? Following Hanne Haavind, Holmberg emphasizes that the wish to have one's gender identity affirmed is a crucial driving force in heterosexual love. In this sense, to the extent that femininity is in great part constituted by a more caring attitude towards others than masculinity, women will tend to voluntarily take part in asymmetrical role-taking. As Holmberg puts it, "women have internalized the gender hierarchy as a part of their gender identity. A consequence of this is that women's choice of strategies for action put them in a subordinated position in relation to men and at the same time it is precisely through this subordination that they are affirmed as women" (1995: 45).

Still, I think it is misleading to put too much emphasis on the affirmation of gender identity *as such*, especially in a context that is largely gender-neutral on the level of intentions. I would argue that the primary motivating

force for people in love relationships is to be validated as *persons*, that is, to be loved. It is only because our existence as persons cannot be separated from our gender identity that the wish to be affirmed as woman or man—or some other gender identity—becomes such a force. If a woman behaves in ways generally perceived as masculine, her primary problem will not be that she is not validated *as woman* but that she is less likely to be experienced as a lovable and desirable person than women who conform to prevailing standards of femininity. As Schwalbe says, "[o]ur needs for love, inclusion, acceptance, and material support—needs which must be met to sustain feelings of esteem, efficacy, and coherence—are usually met by conforming to the expectations of others who are similarly bound to gender ideologies and practices" (1992: 32).

The issue of *expectations* is crucial in the context of love. It is in the nature of love that it cannot be given on demand (Jónasdóttir, 1994); love's power to prove our worth comes from the fact that it makes someone care for us although she does not *have* to. As Arlie Hochschild (1989) highlights, the feelings of gratitude that fuel our love are evoked when we feel that we are given something "extra," something we cannot demand or expect. The fact, then, that expectations on women and men differ, not only due to norms but also to actual behavioral tendencies, means that what induces gratitude, appreciation and love is also gendered. Tove Thagaard combines Jónasdóttir's theory of love power with Hochschild's analysis and concludes:

> One consequence of male exploitation of women's love power may be that the husband more or less takes his wife's love for granted, and will thus not appreciate her consideration of him as a gift. Since the wife is not in a position to count on corresponding love, even small signs of love from her husband may be considered gifts. (1997: 359)

For example, in Holmberg's study, "[t]hat he sometimes talks is interpreted by her as an expression of his understanding her. Differently put, when he refrains from defining the conversation she sees it as an expression of his love for her" (1995: 150). Hence, while the woman's compromising with her own wishes is the normal state of affairs, the man's accommodation to the woman's needs appears, by virtue of its exceptionality, as an expression of love. The other side of the coin is that, when a woman behaves like men normally behave, she will generally appear more unloving than the men. In this sense, a symmetrical subjective experience of being loved may co-exist with an actual asymmetry of loving, while an actual symmetry may appear as if the man is dominated by a "demanding"–even "egoistic" (Langford 1994; Tormey 1976)—woman due to the contrast with the expectations built into the feminine position. Since feeling loved generally makes us love back, the gender-differentiated parameters for what counts as love also implies, with Haavind's words, that "the way feelings of love are called forth in another person is different for men and women" (1984: 144), the general rule being that "[w]hen women engage in the same activities as men they are rewarded less" (139). Put more concisely: women generally need to love more than men in order to be loved.

The above argument depends on a distinction between a subjective and an objective dimension of love. It implies that even though a person feels loved by her partner, if this is not based in her partner's practically realized care for her needs but by a lack of *expectations* to have her needs valued, her feeling of being loved will not have the effect of love proper; that is to say, it will not effectively empower her as person. Being personally empowered is conditioned on the *actual* experience that others value our distinct needs and aims, *in practice*. Conversely, a man who feels unloved only because of his strong sense of entitlement will still be empowered if his needs and wishes *are* actively cared for. In this sense, Schwalbe's statement that we generally have our needs met by conforming to expectations needs qualification, since the appreciation we receive by successfully embodying femininity is far from full-fledged. Being validated as feminine person is paradoxically conditioned on the readiness to set aside one's own person.

In the following section I pinpoint how this structural contradiction shapes women's quest for love in heterosexual coupledom, creating dilemmas for both conformists and resisters.

THE COSTS AND BENEFITS OF CONFORMING

The *conformist* strategy, in its idealized form, would be for the woman to identify with her partner's needs and wishes to the extent that they are experienced almost as her own. This strategy can be highly rewarding on two conditions: that the woman experiences that she *chooses* to put aside her own needs and that she is valued by the man for doing this. The experience of choice preserves her dignity as a person, because even if she makes herself into an object existing for the needs of others, this stems from her own wish. A great advantage of this strategy is that the woman avoids the risk of discovering that her partner's appreciation of her is premised on her not expressing parts of herself that contradict his aims. By *choosing* to put her own needs aside, she can rest in the belief that she would still be loved *if* she chose not to. The disadvantage, however, is that her belief that she is loved for her own sake will never be verified.

More acute problems may arise if the two conditions pointed out above are not met. First, if the woman submits to the wishes of the man because she experiences it as the only way of being "loved," her dignity will be undermined. As Jónasdóttir highlights, the essence of love proper is that it is practiced in a way not determined by the goals of the lover, but that "the object in receiving love win the capability of 'shaping' himself or herself and his or her goals" (1994: 73). It is by virtue of this quality of love, I contend,

that it has the force of empowering us as persons, since being a person is the antithesis of being an object or means of someone else's purposes (Smith 2010). Langford notes that if one is loved only on the condition of suppressing one's self, the love will not have the desired effect. She describes the vicious circle that her interviewee Hannah repeatedly found herself in: "Through engaging in self-objectification, Hannah [. . .] became implicated in a process of losing 'herself' which was motivated, quite paradoxically, by the desire to regain the feeling that she was loved 'for herself'" (1999: 103). This process, which was common in Langford's data, also tends to be self-reinforcing, since it weakens the woman's self-confidence, thereby making her ever more dependent on the man's affirmation.

Second, the counterproductive character of this strategy gets even more marked in case the woman's efforts to please her partner does not have the desired effect of being appreciated. Sarah, another woman in Langford's study, is very unhappy with her relationship but has great difficulties leaving. The awareness of her own submissiveness to her abusive partner undermines her worthiness, making her feel unworthy of love. In this way, her current partner—who at least has not left her—appears to be her only hope of being loved, which compels her to continue her efforts to please him. Put in the terms of expectations and gratitude, her feeling of being unworthy of love will make her grateful even for the smallest crumbs of love. And the more she downgrades her own worth by being grateful to her abuser, the less worthy of love she will appear not only to herself but also to him.[3]

THE RISKS AND PROMISES OF RESISTING

The *resisting* strategy involves the struggle to have one's own needs and wishes honored, even when they contradict those of one's beloved. The great possible gain here is that, if the struggle succeeds, the woman will *know* that her being valued is not premised on her being *useful*. She will feel loved in her own right. The risk, however, is that her struggle for recognition does not succeed. If she ends up being experienced as "too demanding" and "unreasonable," not only her partner's love for her but her love for him is threatened. We should not underestimate the existential and practical significance of the latter in a context where entire living arrangements depend on love. Here, one way for her to save both her experience of him and his experience of her as reasonable and lovable is to fall back upon the conformist strategy, by validating his view of her demands as unreasonable. As Holmberg notes about the instances in which the woman gets angry only to later take up her partner's invalidating stance toward this anger, "it seems that she seeks to make his limit to her anger more comprehensible by seeing herself as demanding and hot-headed" (1995: 163). By sacrificing the validity of her own feelings, she saves the image of her partner as reasonable and lovable and thereby also justifies the "investments" she has made in him (cf. Haavind 1984: 161).

If, instead, the woman sticks to her demands for symmetry in spite of the man's resistance, she risks being left. In the first place, such a demand for symmetry will not be easy to pursue without intellectual and affective feminist resources that help highlight asymmetries that tend to be obscured in the gendered structure of expectations. Yet, feminist consciousness is not enough, since it does not take away the crude risk of being left unloved, in a context where the chances are small of finding another man who will accept demands for symmetry. As Duncombe and Marsden put it, "faced with feminist challenges in their personal lives, men commonly react by denying they have a problem, a way out being to seek validation in another heterosexual relationship with a 'less demanding' woman of more traditional views" (1993: 233).

Moreover, in case the woman does find a man who is genuinely reciprocating, she will still be structurally subordinate to him by virtue of his status of rare exception. Both know that he could get, patriarchally defined, a "better deal." As Hochschild notes, gendered norms about what to expect and what to be grateful for are not only matters of ideology, but grounded in a "pragmatic frame of reference" deriving from comparisons between what one has and what alternative options exist (1989: 108). When unusually equality-oriented men are not especially appreciated for being more considerate than one could generally expect from men, they might thus feel unappreciated. Paradoxically, then, their forbearing from taking advantage of their privileges is likely to be connected to a remaining feeling of entitlement (cf. Pease 2010), which undermines the equality that was intended. For what is at stake is love and appreciation as such, and if men expect more love and appreciation than women for their being equally loving and full of appreciation as women, we are back where we started.

CONCLUSION: FEMININITY AS DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

I have sought to pinpoint the gendered mechanisms by means of which women tend to give more love to men than they get in return in heterosexual coupledom, in spite of the lovers' adherence to notions of equality and the fact that the experience of mutual love is the raison d'être of such coupledom. While Holmberg sees women's wish to have their femininity affirmed as the basis for their subservience, I have argued that gender identity is not the primary "good" in heterosexual interactions, but a crucial vehicle by means of which we become loved. It is the need to be loved that is the basic force in these interactions.

We need love because love is what empowers us as persons. Thus, conforming to expectations built into the feminine position empowers us to the extent that it will tend to ensure that we are loved. Yet, I have shown that the love women get by adhering to gendered expectations is in a way also disenabling them as persons, since it is premised on women's being useful for others rather than valued in their own right, that is being loved in the

proper sense of the term. This contradiction structures women's quest for love and compels them to balance between the risks and gains involved in conforming to subordinate femininity on one hand and those involved in resisting asymmetry on the other.

That the experience of being loved is largely based on the experience of being better treated than one could demand or expect helps explain why feelings of mutual love can co-exist rather smoothly with actual practical asymmetries concerning who cares more for the other. From the point of view of the differences between how women and men generally behave, and thus between what is expected from them, women will simply tend not to be as much appreciated—or loved—for their actual acts of love as men. This leaves us with the peculiar contradiction that a woman may feel unsatisfied with the reciprocity in her relationship with her male partner, while still experiencing that his lesser acts of concern are more valuable as a sign of love by virtue of the fact that they are not to be expected. Yet, even if she does not feel dissatisfied, drawing a distinction between an objective and subjective dimension of love, I have argued that asymmetries will be damaging to the woman's sense of dignity as person.

Is there, then, no way out of these contradictions? It should be emphasized that both the conforming and the resisting strategy are confined by their taking place within the individual heterosexual relationship. As Haavind says, "[w]omen are in an impossible situation in that many of them are trying, on an individual basis, to change the system in ways that require collective efforts" (1984: 166). In order to challenge the conditions of these individual interactions, women need to gather. Much like workers can challenge capitalism only by means of the (threat of a) coordinated withdrawing of their labor power, on which capitalism depends, women's relative withdrawal of their love, on which men depend, can work as a force of structural change only if exercised on a broad level. If women are to be able to take the risk of being left unloved by men, they need to direct more of their love and support toward one another, so as to build up their reservoirs of worthiness as persons relatively independent of men's love (cf. Ferguson 1989; Haavind 1984; Irigaray 1985). It is only when men *have to* be more loving if they are to be loved by women that we can count on change on a collective level. For, as we have seen, rosy norms of equality and mutual love are not much worth if men can enjoy women's love and esteem even if they do not live up to these norms.

NOTES

1. Holmberg uses the method of "bracketing" in her analysis, meaning she does not quote the interviewees literally, but shortens the interview responses so as to comprise only "the meaning that captures the essence of the response" (1993: 85). In order to highlight the general gendered tendencies and to ensure anonymity, the interviewees are also de-individualized such that all men appear as "he" and all women as "she." Also in the presentation of the interview responses Holmberg substitutes "she," "he," "her," and "him" for "I" and "me" and I stick to this stylistic mode when quoting the responses. All citations from Holmberg are translated by me.
2. These gendered behavioral regularities should be seen as tendencies that do not preclude exceptions or complexity. For an elaboration of this theme, see Gunnarsson 2011a, 2013, forthcoming 2014.
3. It should be noted that the self-effacement in which these women engage constitutes an alienated kind of love which, as such, does not empower men in the fundamental sense that genuine love does. Essentially, love is a relation between two irreducible subjectivities and when someone makes herself into an object existing for the other she will in fact not have very much to give of herself to the other. Nevertheless, it is my contention that, *as* the kind of alienated selves that men are paradigmatically constituted as under patriarchy, they are empowered by women's alienated love. It is only that the restricted masculine selves produced by this exploitative order are premised on the suppression of possibilities of a more fulfilling mode of human bonding and, consequently, a fuller realization of men's selves. In Gunnarsson 2013 and forthcoming 2014 I elaborate extensively on these issues.

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Part II

The Ethical and Political Implications of Time and Love in Caring Practices and Research