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| Romantic Love and Monogamy |
| A Philosophical Exploration |
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**Abstract**

For many people, to love someone romantically entails being in a monogamous relationship with them. However, on reflection, it seems odd to make your love for someone conditional on them renouncing two things of great value – love and sex, with other people. This thesis seeks to explore whether monogamy is compatible with romantic love, and whether it ought to be the hegemonic norm that it is. I argue that romantic love is a distinct and valuable kind of love and that there might be advantages to sharing it with only one other person, but that it is possible for it to exist between more than two people. Furthermore, it makes sense that such a relationship will have a sexual element, since sex can act as a vehicle for some of the central goods we find in romantic love. Therefore, restricting sex to that relationship can be a way of affirming the value of the relationship and marking it out as distinct from friendships. Thus, monogamy is compatible with romantic love. Nonetheless, monogamy is not *ceteris paribus* morally superior to non-monogamous forms of sexual and loving relationship and it ought not to be a hegemonic norm. This is because, by being such a dominant norm, the potential value it can have is diminished, as people are robbed of the opportunity to choose it for the right reasons. Furthermore, the dominance of the norm can lead us to overlook the real point of sexual fidelity and mistakenly equate it with love, as well as under-emphasising other ways of being faithful to a romantic partner.

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**Introduction**

The vast majority of people living in the Western World will be in a monogamous romantic relationship at some point. Some of us will spend most of our lives in such a relationship. Indeed, this is something most of us desire and find value in. However, although, on the face of it, monogamy seems desirable and natural, there are reasons to believe that monogamy is incompatible with love. To make your love for someone conditional upon them completely restricting two things usually held to have value – love and sex – seems to be, on further reflection, antithetical to what we normally think it means to love someone. This is not because there is necessarily something problematic about love being conditional. As I will argue in the thesis, romantic love depends on a particular kind of relationship, so sometimes we will not want what is best for our partner if it conflicts with the good of the relationship. It is fair enough, for instance, for your love for your partner to be conditional on them remaining in the same country as you. However, it is not immediately obvious why them having sex outside the relationship or loving someone else needs to present a problem for your relationship.

Moreover, in non-romantic forms of loving relationship we do not tend to require each other to have no other relationships of the same kind. Indeed, you are usually held to be a bad friend if you demand your friend to have no other friends but you; or a bad sister if you don’t want your brother to love his other sisters. By contrast, many people would go as far as to say that you are simply not ‘in love’ if you do not care about your partner sharing sexual and romantic experiences with others. It is fairly commonly held that it is impossible to love more than one person romantically, yet, that it is possible, and indeed, desirable, for a mother to love her six children equally or for a person to love ten friends equally.

In this thesis I will consider why we hold these views about romantic love and monogamy, and whether we ought to continue to do so. In order to do this, I will first dismiss the idea that monogamy is *ceteris paribus* morally superior to non-monogamous forms of sexual and romantic relationship. I will then consider four issues. First, we need to get a better handle on the nature of romantic love; this will involve asking questions like: ‘is romantic love different from other kinds of love?’ and ‘why does Jason love Matilda but not her twin sister, Maria, who shares many of Matilda’s properties?’ Second, we need to understand what the *value* of romantic love is, and how this value differs from the value of other kinds of love. If there were no distinct value to romantic love, it would be difficult to justify why we ought to bother with monogamy. Third, the relationship between love and sex needs to be explored and in particular, why romantic relationships tend to include sex. This is because the requirement of sexual exclusivity, which is a significant part of monogamy, will need to make reference to the connection between sex and love. Finally, we need to consider whether there is a relationship between love and sexual exclusivity and, if so, what sort of relationship this is.

Ultimately, I will argue that there can be value in monogamy, but that monogamy should not be the hegemonic cultural norm that it currently is because its value is contingent and does not always trump the value of sexual and emotional freedom. Furthermore, although there are many moral issues surrounding monogamy and it is wrong to break a promise to be monogamous without the consent of one’s partner, monogamy is not intrinsically morally superior to non-monogamous forms of relationship. A monogamous life is not *ceteris paribus* a more moral life than a life which involves casual sex or polyamory (the practice of having more than one sexual and/or romantic partner with the consent of everyone involved).

In this introduction I will do three things. First, I will clarify what I mean by monogamy, non-monogamy and romantic love because there is some ambiguity to these terms. Second, I will point to some of the political issues surrounding monogamy and explain why I will not be considering them in this thesis. Third, I will provide a roadmap of the thesis, briefly outlining what will be discussed and argued in each chapter.

**1) What is monogamy?**

The etymology of the term ‘monogamy’ is ‘one marriage’, coming from the Greek words *monos* (single or alone) and *gamos* (marriage). Traditionally, it referred to the practice of having only one spouse during the course of a lifetime. However, it is now widely used to refer to any romantic relationship in which the partners commit to not have sex or develop romantic attachments with anyone outside of the relationship.[[1]](#footnote-1) This is how I will use and understand the term in this thesis, though my main focus will be on relatively committed and long-term relationships. The commitment to monogamy may be, and often is, implicit, but it does need to exist for a relationship to be described as monogamous. Thus, monogamy is not only a description of a state of affairs whereby two people have sex exclusively: two people who have sex only with each other simply because they do not feel attracted to anyone else or cannot find anyone else who is attracted to them are not in a monogamous relationship; at any time, one of them could legitimately have sex with another person. Thus, to be monogamous you must not only behave monogamously, you must do so with monogamous intentions; you must allow monogamy to be a principle which guides your relationship.

In addition, the restrictions imposed by monogamy extend further than just a commitment to sexual exclusivity. One of the reasons monogamy can cause problems in relationships is that people disagree over which actions should be exclusive. Other activities that a couple might choose to do exclusively are: holding hands, sharing a bed, seeing one another naked, and sharing very personal information. These activities are those which tend to mark out the romantic relationship as distinct from friendships and other relationships. Thus, monogamy is about committing to having only one relationship of a particular kind; sexual exclusivity tends to be part of this commitment but it is not all of it. Indeed, a couple could still feasibly describe themselves as monogamous if they were both asexual, meaning that they do not experience sexual attraction to anyone or have interest in sexual activity.

**2) What is non-monogamy?**

The associations people tend to have with non-monogamy are often rather negative. People sometimes assume that the alternative to monogamy is polygamy, which they equate with polygyny – the practice of one man having several wives who are married to him but not to each other – and oppression to women. Others might assume that the alternative is promiscuity or ‘free love’, which they imagine involves failing to treat people with due respect, and also, perhaps, with objectifying and mistreating women in particular. In this thesis, what I am taking to be the most significant competitor to monogamy is polyamory, which is a fairly recent term adopted to cover various different relationship styles that involve some form of committed, loving relationship but also a degree of non-exclusivity.[[2]](#footnote-2) Thus, a polyamorous relationship might be one in which four people all share a sexual and romantic relationship with each other but are exclusive within that group, or it might be one in which a man and a woman are married but have some form of sexual relations with others outside of their relationship, a so-called ‘open relationship’.

**3) What is romantic love?**

The term ‘romantic love’ conjures up a variety of images and means different things to different people. In this thesis, I am using it to describe a particular form of caring intimate relationship. It is difficult to identify a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for a romantic relationship, but we can identify some of its core characteristics, many of which are shared with family relationships and most of which also apply to intimate friendship. Here I offer a set of ten features (in no particular order) that I think roughly make up a fairly uncontroversial ideal of romantic love:

1. Romantic lovers actively care about each other’s well-being and want to contribute to it.
2. A romantic relationship is, ideally, a mutual, reciprocal relationship between equals.
3. Romantic love is selective: we choose our romantic partners and it is not possible to love everyone romantically.
4. Romantic love is conditional and can end: the beloved will not necessarily be loved under all circumstances (for example if they totally change personality) and romantic love does not always last forever.
5. It is tenacious: although it is conditional, it can withstand changes in the personalities and circumstances of the lover and the beloved.
6. Romantic love often feels out of our control; we ‘fall in love’ and often feel that we cannot just end our love at will.
7. It involves a desire for physical and emotional intimacy and usually involves a desire for sexual intimacy for at least part of the relationship.
8. Romantic love involves a desire to share one’s life and identity with one’s beloved to some degree.
9. A romantic relationship requires some kind of demarcation; we need to know who is in the relationship and who is not.
10. Romantic lovers are committed to one another and to the relationship, and at least aim at the relationship being long-lasting, if not permanent.

It is also important to consider what romantic love is *not.* Most notably, I have omitted both procreation and marriage from the list. This is because, although romantic lovers very often do get married and procreate, they may have been lovers before they desired to do either and would have continued to be lovers had they never married or procreated. Thus, romantic love is highly intelligible in the absence of marriage and procreation. We have no trouble conceiving of relationships such as those between Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, or Jean Cocteau and Jean Marais as romantic despite them not involving marriage or procreation; and some great fictional love stories do not culminate in marriage or procreation, such as the relationship between Guinevere and Lancelot or Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw. Indeed, until very recently, same-sex partners in the United Kingdom could not get married and they cannot procreate together, yet they have relationships that are equally romantic in nature as those between opposite-sex partners. Equally, neither marriage nor procreation, nor both together, makes a relationship romantic. For example, people who are in arranged marriages, or who have married out of convenience or because of a desire to bear children might procreate and remain married to one another for life but never be romantically in love.

**4) Monogamy as a political issue**

There has been some recent interest among philosophers and legal theorists over which relationships the state ought to legally recognise and support. This is probably at least partly due to the recent legalisation of same-sex marriage in many countries and states. Some philosophers have suggested that we ought to expand the definition of marriage further. For example, Gregg Strauss, Andrew March and Cheshire Calhoun have all produced arguments defending the practice and legalisation of polygamy.[[3]](#footnote-3) Thom Brooks, on the other hand, argues against polygamy, but only on prudential grounds, observing that in practice it would be popular only as polygyny and, therefore, its legalisation would lead to women being harmed.[[4]](#footnote-4) Arguments have also been made for the state to broaden the concept of marriage beyond just romantic, sexual relationships. For example, Laura Rosenbury argues that friends should be able to marry,[[5]](#footnote-5) and Elizabeth Brake suggests that we should be able to marry anyone with whom we share a caring relationship and we should be able to divide up the rights conferred by marriage between various caring relationships.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Though this thesis will touch on some of the political issues surrounding monogamy, it will not consider any of these in any detail. This is, in part, because the most significant political issues relating to love and monogamy are those to do with marriage and child-rearing, and I am interested in monogamy and romantic love between non-married people as well as those who are married. My main focus is the relationship between romantic love and monogamy, and although romantic lovers often marry and have children, marriage and parenthood are not necessary features of romantic love. Moreover, whether or not the state should support relationships, and how they should do this, will depend on whether they promote human flourishing and so this question must be answered first. Nonetheless, the conception of romantic love that I develop may well have political implications.

**5) Roadmap of thesis**

I will begin in Chapter One by explaining why some common moral arguments in favour of monogamy are unpersuasive. The gaps in these moral arguments set up the approach that I will take in this thesis, which is to examine monogamy from the perspective of the value of romantic love. Following this, I will try to get to grips with the nature and value of romantic love, since monogamy can be important only if romantic love is a distinct and valuable kind of love. Therefore, Chapters Two, Three and Four are dedicated to considering what romantic love is and why we love some people and not others. Chapter Five will examine what, if any, distinctive value romantic love has, paying particular attention to the differences between romantic love and friendship. In the sixth chapter, I respond to the question: why do we tend to have sex with those whom we love romantically? Chapter Seven, asks what, if any, the relationship is between sexual exclusivity and love. I will now outline the arguments put forward in each chapter.

Chapter One – Moral arguments in favour of monogamy

The purpose of this chapter is to show that there is not a *ceteris paribus* moral imperative to be monogamous and that therefore, if we want to explain the intelligibility of monogamy, we will have to adopt a different kind of approach. Moral arguments in favour of monogamy tend to prohibit all non-monogamous sex, making one or both of the following two claims: 1) having sex with someone outside of marriage/a committed loving relationship is to mistreat that person and perhaps yourself; 2) heterosexual, procreative, monogamous marriage is a fundamental human good and having sex outside of this form of marriage is wrong because it undermines this good (these sorts of arguments have been referred to as new natural law arguments).

With regard to the first claim, I will discuss arguments put forward by Immanuel Kant and Roger Scruton. Kant argues that sex outside of marriage degrades people, reducing them to ‘their sex’. Scruton does not claim that all sex outside of marriage is wrong but does think that sex that occurs outside of a loving, committed relationship degrades and objectifies both participants. I object that there are not, as Kant and Scruton seem to claim, only two stances towards people that we can adopt in the way we treat them during sex – either treating someone as an object, or treating them as the full and unique person they are. Furthermore, marriage is neither a necessary nor sufficient way out of the problem that sexual desire takes a person as its object. It is possible to have sex outside of marriage which treats the other respectfully, and the act of marriage itself is not sufficient to solve the problem of sexual objectification because two people could marry one another purely to use each other as sex objects. In addition, love is also by no means sufficient for treating another as a person in sex: sex within a committed loving relationship might involve one or both partners being treated as less than a person.

On the second claim, I will consider arguments made by John Finnis and Mary Catherine Geach. Both argue that heterosexual, monogamous, procreative marriage is a fundamental human good and sex outside of it is morally wrong because it denies this good. Sex can be morally acceptable only between a married, monogamous, heterosexual couple, not using contraception and not aiming only at pleasure. I object to these accounts by pointing out that they have made very dubious claims about sex, marriage and procreation, such as that sex has a dual function and that children are always best raised by heterosexual, monogamous, married partners.

There are, of course, important moral questions relating to monogamy and these are amplified where children are involved. However, for monogamy *per se* to be morally significant, it would need to be immoral to be non-monogamous without any deception, cheating, promise-breaking or hurtfulness. It would need to be more moral to make the promise of monogamy than not to make it, if you are to have sex at all. The moral arguments I consider in this chapter have not shown that this is the case. A moral argument in favour of monogamy would be more convincing if it offered a detailed conception of what a romantic relationship is and how monogamy fits into it. In the thesis I will attempt to provide such a conception. However, I will conclude that, although there can be value in monogamous romantic love, moral arguments against non-monogamy are still unpersuasive and, consequently, monogamy should not be the dominant social norm that it currently is.

Chapter Two – Can we derive a good account of romantic love from Frankfurt’s views of love?

Here, I consider Harry Frankfurt’s account of love, which describes love as a kind of attitude towards an object, though he claims that it is unimportant what the object is. I argue that Frankfurt’s theory cannot provide us with a good model of romantic love because the attitudes involved in romantic love depend very much on the properties of the beloved and the relationship shared with them. Further, this does not mean that romantic love is less valuable than other kinds of love, as Frankfurt implies, but rather that it has a different kind of value.

Frankfurt argues against the idea that love is a rational response to a positive appraisal of the beloved. Although love might be stirred by the beloved’s qualities, those qualities do not justify the love felt by the lover; to think that they do is to confuse the causes of love with the reasons for love. Furthermore, Frankfurt argues that the reason we love is because love provides us with ‘final ends’ which give our lives meaning and stave off boredom and depression. Final ends are final in the sense that we cannot help but care about them and we do not care about them simply in order to attain another end. Love thus helps to provide a shape to our lives; it also helps to create and sustain our identities because caring about things gives us a continuous nature, a sense of who we are that lasts over time.

Frankfurt suggests that there are ‘four main conceptually necessary features’ of love ‘of any variety.’[[7]](#footnote-7) These are: 1) love ‘consists most basically in a disinterested concern for the well-being or flourishing of the person who is loved’[[8]](#footnote-8); (2) love is ‘ineluctably personal’[[9]](#footnote-9); (3) ‘the lover identifies with his beloved’[[10]](#footnote-10) and (4) ‘love is not a matter of choice’.[[11]](#footnote-11) These features will be explained and elaborated on in the chapter. I argue that Frankfurt’s account has the advantage of appealing to the intuition we have that love is reasonless. However, we might question the accuracy of this intuition, and, moreover, there are problems with each of Frankfurt’s four features when applied to romantic love. This is not problematic for Frankfurt because he is not interested in romantic love, suggesting that ‘relationships of those kinds typically include a number of vividly distracting elements’[[12]](#footnote-12) and are inauthentic examples of love. However, I argue that by describing love as if there is only one kind, which comes in degrees of authenticity, he ends up overlooking the distinctive value of romantic love. Indeed, romantic love is distinctly valuable, at least in part, because it is selective, conditional, and makes us feel good about ourselves. Understanding the ways in which romantic love is unique will help us to comprehend why romantic love is typically monogamous while other kinds of love are not.

Chapter Three – Do we love people for their properties?

In this chapter, I consider whether the reasons that we love people romantically are their properties. This view is, in a way, in direct opposition to Frankfurt’s view. Whilst Frankfurt argues that love is arational, this view holds that love is a rational response to the properties of the beloved. Frankfurt argues that my beloved is valuable *because* I love her; an advocate of the properties view argues that I love my beloved *because* she is valuable. Although this view has the strength of making love non-arbitrary, there are several problems with it (I describe seven in the chapter). For example, it struggles to explain how love is different from admiration or liking, and has difficulty explaining why romantic love is tenacious and persists despite changes in the beloved.

Both Simon Keller (2000) and Neil Delaney (1996) have reformulated the properties view in an effort to avoid some of the common objections to it. They both do this by taking into account the significance of the romantic relationship in explaining why we love our romantic partners and by being more specific about the kinds of properties that make love appropriate. Keller argues that underlying many of the qualities for which we ought to be loved is that they are qualities that make us a good romantic partner to our lover. As we might come to be a better romantic partner to our lover as the relationship progresses, one of the reasons that romantic love is tenacious is because through it we develop properties that make us even more lovable to our lover.[[13]](#footnote-13) In addition, Keller argues that often lovers change together and that, in any case, being in a romantic relationship requires you to commit and not be willing to trade up at the first opportunity.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Delaney argues that only properties which are central to a person’s self-conception are appropriate reasons to love them,[[15]](#footnote-15) but that qualities are not sufficient grounds of love: the lover must also want to form a romantic attachment or ‘we’ with her beloved and be committed to them.[[16]](#footnote-16) He argues that romantic love is tenacious for two reasons: firstly, some of the qualities for which we are loved are ‘historical-relational properties,’ which are non-duplicable properties relating to the history of our relationship, such as ‘being the person who taught you the piano’.[[17]](#footnote-17) Secondly, in ideal cases, love ‘tracks’ the changes in the beloved, so if you love your beloved for qualities, A, B and C, but he later loses these qualities and develops properties X, Y and Z, you will come to love him for X, Y and Z instead.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Although both Keller’s and Delaney’s accounts get us some way in understanding romantic love, there are still unanswered questions. As they both maintain that love is grounded on the intrinsic properties of the beloved, their accounts struggle to respond to questions such as how love differs from admiration and whether the beloved is loved as a whole person or a collection of qualities. Furthermore, neither of their responses to the worry that love grounded in qualities cannot withstand changes in the beloved’s qualities or opportunities to ‘trade-up’ are satisfactory, as I will explain in the chapter.

Chapter Four: What is the role of the romantic relationship in explaining why we love the particular people that we do?

The previous chapter highlighted a need to consider, in some detail, the romantic relationship in relation to romantic love. In this chapter, I defend Niko Kolodny’s claim that it is relationships that justify love, though it may be the qualities of the beloved that lead us to want to develop a relationship with them in the first place. However, I argue that there are some gaps in his account, relating specifically to romantic relationships, that will need to be filled in in order to answer the question of whether monogamy is important for romantic love.

In the first section of the chapter I outline Kolodny’s account. He makes several compelling objections against both Frankfurt’s theory and the properties view, some of which also provide reasons to accept his own account. For example, he argues that Frankfurt cannot distinguish between love and mere urges to help another. This is because Frankfurt does not take into account that love is normatively appropriate in some cases but not in others. Normativity is central to Kolodny’s theory of love: in order to love we must understand and appreciate why the love is a fitting response to the object, and in most cases, it will be the relationship shared with the beloved that makes love a fitting response to them.[[19]](#footnote-19) When you stop loving someone it is usually because your relationship is no longer of the kind that makes love appropriate. Kolodny thus overcomes the problem faced by proponents of the properties view that they cannot explain why the lover responds to the beloved with love rather than admiration or liking. One can admire another whom one barely knows, but love requires a valued relationship with the beloved.

It seems right that sharing a relationship with one’s beloved is a necessary component of love. The idea of ‘unrequited love’ makes sense only if the lover shares some kind of relationship or history with the beloved. Furthermore, if you love someone, it seems necessary that you at least desire to share a relationship with them. Kolodny’s view also has a way of accounting for the conflicting intuitions we have that love is reasonless and mysterious, but also that we love people for their qualities. Love seems inexplicable because the relationship ‘just does’ make love appropriate and the beloved’s properties are what make such a relationship possible in the case of friendship and romantic love. Finally, Kolodny can explain the phenomenon of ‘loving the relationship’ as well as the beloved.

However, despite its strengths, Kolodny does not provide a full account of romantic love. Firstly, he does not explain why relationships are valuable in the first place. This is particularly salient with romantic love as people do end and decide not to enter romantic relationships because they simply do not want a relationship of that sort with anyone. Secondly, he does not explain why romantic relationships tend towards monogamy. Thirdly, he does not discuss why romantic relationships are typically sexual. Finally, he does not adequately account for the difference between friendship and romantic love. In conclusion, I will argue that, although his model of love is generally accurate, it needs more detail in order to be a full account of romantic love. I will attempt to fill in this detail in the following chapters.

Chapter Five: What is the distinct value of a two-person romantic relationship?

This chapter provides an analysis of the distinct value of romantic love and fills in two of the gaps in Kolodny’s account, considering why a romantic relationship might be valuable to us and how romantic love differs from other kinds of relationship, particularly friendship. I argue that although, in some ways, romantic love and friendship differ in *degree*, in that romantic love can seem like a more intense and significant form of friendship, they are also different in *kind*. It is not the case that once two people have become close enough friends they then become romantic lovers. I defend the view, versions of which have been put forward by Plato in *The Symposium,* Hegel,[[20]](#footnote-20) Robert Solomon[[21]](#footnote-21) and Robert Nozick,[[22]](#footnote-22) that what is distinct about romantic love is that the lovers share their identities in a unique way. Although this account of romantic love might appear to be both too weak (because we share our identities all the time with various people) and too strong (because we do not literally share our identities and become one unit) to distinguish romantic love, I argue that lovers do share their lives in a unique way and that this accounts for some of the distinct value of romantic love. Romantic lovers take on a commitment to share their lives, which entails such things as: sharing important life decisions, spending a substantial amount of time with each other, and developing a shared public identity.

Sharing identities in this way presents us with certain responsibilities and obligations, but it also adds value to our lives. Firstly, including another in your life makes your life intrinsically important to that person; the trivialities of your life that once meant something only to you now take on significance in the world; you are recognised as being important and valuable in your own right. In addition, a shared life provides you with security, with a person who will be there for you should you need them, who will share your problems and who will take responsibility for you. Thus, we have good reasons to want romantic love in our lives in addition to familial relationships and friendships. Furthermore, I argue that although such a relationship could be held between a number of people larger than two, say three or four, who were all committed to one another, a degree of ‘relationship exclusivity’ is essential for such a relationship because of the commitment it requires and our psychological limitations. In addition, exclusivity has value in its own right: an exclusive relationship has more well-defined edges, thus making it easier to know what your obligations and rights are within the relationship. For many people, it might be more difficult to arrange this kind of relationship between more than two people. An exclusive relationship also affirms the unique importance of both partners as each has been chosen as the person with whom the other wants to share their life. For these reasons, there can be distinct value in a two-person romantic relationship, though romantic love need not be exclusive to two people.

Chapter Six: Why does a romantic relationship typically include sex?

One of the gaps I identified in Kolodny’s account of romantic love is that he seems to assume that sex is an integral part of romantic love without really explaining why this is so. Indeed, he is by no means alone in doing this. The question of what, if any, the relationship is between love and sex is important, because if there is no relationship then it will be difficult to justify the requirement of sexual exclusivity in a romantic relationship. I will first consider a sexual liberationist account, which claims that we should decouple love and sex. I argue that this kind of account over-emphasises the differences between love and sex and downplays their similarities. Furthermore, although I agree that it is a good thing to have greater freedom in the way that we have sex and construct our intimate relationships, it does not necessarily limit our sexual liberty to maintain that sex is an important part of a romantic relationship.

I argue that sex is typically a feature of romantic love because it can be an important vehicle for romantic love in two ways: it can express romantic love and it can ‘make love’, creating and intensifying it. This is because some of the central goods that we want from romantic love: 1) union/physical closeness, (2) intimacy, (3) vulnerability and care and (4) pleasure, can all be found in sex. Firstly, in the context of a society in which personal space is valued and we conceal our nakedness, sex can be an expression and a constituent of the togetherness felt by the lovers, of their ‘*we*-ness’. Secondly, sex can build, express and constitute the emotional intimacy of the lovers because it is usually an intimate act due to the closeness, vulnerability and privacy typically involved. Thirdly, I defend James Giles’ claim that vulnerability and care are essential features of romantic love,[[23]](#footnote-23) and I argue that sex can build, express and constitute this vulnerability and care that are pre-conditions for some other goods of the relationship, such as intimacy. The fourth good of a romantic relationship that I discuss is pleasure. I argue that romantic love is distinct from familial love in that you select your romantic partner and the relationship tends to be conditional on you enjoying the relationship and finding it valuable. Including sex as part of their relationship gives the romantic lovers a space wherein their main priority is to attend to the pleasure of each other, and to express how much they enjoy being with each other. This is intrinsically valuable and can also have supportive value to the rest of the relationship.

Chapter Seven: What is the relationship between sexual exclusivity and romantic love?

By this point, I will have established that romantic love is a distinct and valuable kind of love for which there are reasons, and that there are good reasons for sex to be a feature of a romantic relationship. There are also some reasons why a two-person relationship might be worthwhile, though these are contingent. In this final chapter I address whether it makes sense for sexual exclusivity to be a condition of romantic love. We tend to believe that sexual exclusivity is an important, even essential, feature of romantic love. Indeed, sexual exclusivity is considered to be so important that a breach of it is often considered a fair reason to end a romantic relationship. However, many people do not consider why this is, but simply take it for granted. Furthermore, as I mentioned at the beginning, on reflection, it appears that there is a tension between loving someone and requiring them to forego sex with anyone but you. In this chapter, I argue that, based on what we have learned about romantic love and sex in the previous chapters, it is possible to justify the requirement of sexual exclusivity in a romantic relationship. A commitment to sexual exclusivity can be a way of marking out the romantic relationship as distinct and affirming its significance. However, I argue that it is not a necessary feature of romantic love and the hegemonic norm of sexual exclusivity diminishes the possible value it may have.

I consider four possible ways of justifying sexual exclusivity, arguing that none succeeds, but that there are things to be learned from each of them. The four justifications I consider are: 1) romantic relationships are necessarily sexually exclusive; 2) sexual exclusivity protects the relationship; 3) jealousy gives us reason to be sexually exclusive; 4) extra-relatal sex[[24]](#footnote-24) is a denial of the value of sex in the relationship. I argue that none of these justifications is persuasive, but that there are things to be preserved from them in developing a justification for sexual exclusivity. I argue that sexual exclusivity could be justified if it adds value to the sex had by the couple and to their relationship. Sharing an activity exclusively can help to distinguish their relationship from friendships and it makes sense to choose sex for this purpose due to its connection with romantic love, as described in Chapter Six. Thus, sexual exclusivity can act as a celebration and marker of their shared identity and can have a supportive role in the relationship, providing the lovers with a space that is special and private to them.

However, there are limits to this justification and it does not imply that for every couple the value brought to the relationship by sexual exclusivity will outweigh the value of sexual freedom. Furthermore, it does not justify sexual exclusivity as the dominant social norm that it is. I consider two problems caused by the norm. Firstly, the dominance of the norm robs people of the opportunity to choose to be monogamous for the right reasons. It is less likely to add value to the relationship if the lovers are monogamous because they are conforming to a norm than because they have freely chosen it. Secondly, it gives the idea of faithfulness the wrong focus, making us overlook the fact that sexual exclusivity is a means to support the relationship, and that there are other ways in which we ought to be faithful to our partners that are equally as important.

Conclusions

This investigation of romantic love will draw several conclusions, which are summarised below:

1. The first is that romantic love is a distinct kind of love that has reasons, though it often feels like it does not. Although the properties of the beloved are what makes a relationship with them possible, it is the relationship we share with them that provides the most important ground to love them.
2. Romantic relationships are distinct from familial relationships in that we select our romantic partners and romantic love is conditional; we will not necessarily continue to love our romantic partner whatever they do. Romantic relationships are distinct from friendship because we share our life and identity with our romantic partner in a unique way, because the relationship is more exclusive and because it involves more commitment. Romantic love provides us with a valuable kind of recognition of our lives, affirming our unique importance. Such relationships need not be held between two people only, but there may be some benefits to a two-person relationship.
3. It seems natural that we will want to have sex with the person with whom we want to share such a relationship because sex has various expressive and symbolic qualities that can make it an effective vehicle for love: building, expressing and constituting it.
4. Because of these qualities of sex, combined with the distinct value of sharing an identity with another in the way that romantic lovers do, sexual exclusivity can be a way of affirming the value of the romantic relationship. It can also have supportive value, helping the lovers to distinguish their relationship from other friendships and remain focussed on one another. However, the dominant social norm of sexual exclusivity diminishes this value, and makes us overlook the real point of sexual faithfulness.
5. Therefore, once we fill in the details of what a romantic relationship is, and how sex and exclusivity fit into that, it is apparent that there can be value in monogamy. Nonetheless, this value is contingent and nothing in my account suggests that all people will necessarily flourish more in a monogamous relationship than in a non-monogamous one or in no romantic relationship at all. In addition, my account does not justify the claim that non-monogamous sex and love are harmful to individuals or society. Thus, the value of monogamous romantic love is not moral value and *ceteris paribus* we are not better people if we are monogamous.

**Chapter One: Moral arguments in favour of monogamy**

**1) Introduction**

Some people argue that sex can be moral only within a monogamous relationship, and so, if we are to have sex at all, there is a moral imperative to be monogamous. In this chapter, I will outline some accounts of love and sex which claim that any kind of non-monogamous sex or love is immoral. However, I will argue that these accounts are unpersuasive in responding to the question of whether we ought to be monogamous because they do not provide a sufficiently full conception of the distinctiveness and value of romantic love, the relationship between love and sex, or the relationship between love and sexual exclusivity. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to set up my point of departure for the rest of the thesis. The gaps in these moral arguments set up the approach that I will take in this thesis, which is to examine monogamy from the perspective of the value of romantic love. However, it will become apparent during the thesis that when the details have been filled in, although monogamy can have value, it is not morally superior to other kinds of relationship.

Moral arguments in favour of monogamy tend to prohibit all non-monogamous sex, making one or both of the following two claims: 1) having sex with someone outside of marriage/a committed loving relationship is to mistreat that person and perhaps yourself; 2) heterosexual, procreative, monogamous marriage is a fundamental human good and having sex outside of this form of marriage is wrong because it undermines this human good (these sorts of arguments have been referred to as new natural law arguments). In what follows, I will outline and object to these claims. With regard to the first claim, I will discuss arguments put forward by Immanuel Kant and Roger Scruton. On the second claim, I will consider arguments made by John Finnis and Mary Catherine Geach.

**2) Sex outside of a monogamous loving relationship/marriage is wrong because it denies the personhood of the other**

In his lecture, *Duties towards the Body in Respect of Sexual Impulse*, Kant argues that sexual desire degrades people ‘to their sex’, in which case, ‘humanity is set aside’ and is ‘sacrificed to sex’. When Matilda wants Jason (to whom she is not married) sexually, she does not want him as a rational human being, but as a man who will satisfy her sexual desires. If Jason and Matilda have sex, they will deny each other of their rational nature, using as a tool to satisfy their sexual desire and failing to treat each other with the appropriate respect. The sexual impulse is seen by Kant as an animal impulse and so to use humanity to satisfy it is to dishonour humanity, putting it ‘on a par with animal nature’.[[25]](#footnote-25) Sex is the only way that we can do this, for *‘*we never find that a human being can be the object of another’s enjoyment, save through the sexual impulse.’[[26]](#footnote-26) As Christine Korsgaard highlights, Kant’s problem is not that one is using another as a means to one’s own pleasure, for this would not be an accurate depiction of sexual relations and could be overcome through mutual, free consent. Instead, ‘what bothers Kant is rather that sexual desire takes a *person* for its object,’[[27]](#footnote-27) because ‘as soon as anyone becomes an object of another’s appetite, all motives of moral relationship fall away’.[[28]](#footnote-28) Kant is thus worried about Jason being seen as an object of sexual desire because then Matilda will not be motivated to treat him morally. This is true even if they have a consensual sexual relationship but are not married. In such a relationship Jason and Matilda are still used as things because each cares only for the other’s sex, not their whole person. Further, because human beings are unified entities, we cannot surrender only parts of ourselves and so in a consensual sexual relationship we end up making our whole selves into things.[[29]](#footnote-29)

The only way to avoid this charge, in Kant’s view, is to have sex only within marriage. When people get married they give each other rights over the whole of their person: body and mind. Consequently, when marital partners have sex, because they have surrendered their whole person to each other, they are not just having sex with each other on account of their sex, but on account of their whole person, and so they do not degrade each other through sexual desire.[[30]](#footnote-30) In addition, because marriage is reciprocal, each gives the other rights over themselves but gains rights over the other and so does not lose out. One thus only ‘reclaims itself and restores its personality’ through acquiring another person as well. As Korsgaard puts it, ‘perfect reciprocity is the only condition under which the sexual relation is morally legitimate; and Kant thinks this condition is possible only in marriage, where the reciprocity of surrender has been pledged’.[[31]](#footnote-31) In Kant’s words: ‘it is not only admissible for the sexes to surrender to and accept each other for enjoyment under the condition of marriage, but it is possible for them to do so *only* under this condition.’[[32]](#footnote-32) Furthermore, marriage must be monogamous because ‘in polygamy the person who surrenders herself gains only a part of the man who gets her completely, and therefore makes herself into a mere thing.’[[33]](#footnote-33) Thus, in a polygamous marriage, the participants are not equal and so some of them will be taken as objects.

Scruton does not adhere to everything Kant says about sex, suggesting that he is overly pessimistic about the possibilities for sexual desire to be linked to love. He does not argue that all sex outside of marriage is wrong but agrees that sex that occurs outside of a loving, committed relationship degrades and objectifies both participants.[[34]](#footnote-34) In a similar vein to Kant, he claims that sex without love reduces participants to ‘mere bodies’ rather than complex persons with minds. According to Scruton, when we have sex without love:

‘we remove what is deepest in ourselves – our life – from our moral commerce, and set it apart, in a realm that is free from the sovereignty of a moral law, a realm of curious pleasure, in which the body is both sovereign and obscene.’[[35]](#footnote-35)

This is because human sex, according to Scruton, has a *personal* nature, and is aimed, not at an orgasm, or for the physical pleasure that the body of another will provide, but rather at uniting with that *particular* person *because* they are that unique individual. Sexual desire ‘involves concentration upon the embodied existence of the other’.[[36]](#footnote-36) The term ‘embodiment’ refers not only to the body*,* but also to the individual within the body. If, he argues, when we experience sexual desire, all we want is physical pleasure, then masturbation would always be a satisfactory way to fulfil our desire, and evidently, it is not.[[37]](#footnote-37) Further evidence for the personal nature of sexual desire is that we would feel disgusted at learning that the hand we thought was touching us was, in fact, that of an interloper, even though the physical sensations would not have changed.[[38]](#footnote-38) Scruton argues that in such a case, the fact that the pleasure disappears upon discovery of the interloper shows that it depends upon the belief about the particularity of the sexual partner. Therefore, when we feel sexual desire, we want to feel not only the sexual pleasure that can be gained from another’s body, but to feel sexual pleasure gained from the body of that *particular person*; we want to think ‘it is *he* who is alertly touching me...’Indeed, the pleasure we feel will be due as much as, if not more than, the physical sensations; to it being provided by *that* person. Only *that* person will be able to fulfil our desire, not just anyone with similar characteristics.[[39]](#footnote-39)

Thus, sexual desire is *intentionalised.* Intentional pleasures are directed at something specific, and require the active involvement of the pleasure seeker. A non-intentional pleasure, on the other hand, is passive, and is not directed at something specific. Animals are capable of feeling non-intentional sensational pleasures, such as the feeling of wind in their face; intentional pleasures, on the other hand, can be experienced only by humans, since a degree of rationality and self-consciousness is required to experience them. Sexual desire, Scruton argues, is an intentionalised desire aimed at a particular individual.

Furthermore, Scruton argues that there is a three-stage process characteristic of the fulfillment of sexual desire: 1) mutual arousal and embodiment, leading to (2) emotional intimacy, leading to (3) love. This is the crucial part of his argument as thus far what he has said is compatible with a situation where, for example, you have sex with a friend, or indeed with someone you barely know, so long as you see them as a non-fungible whole person. However, Scruton argues that sex which does not follow his prescribed course is ultimately unfulfilling. The course of desire begins with mutual arousal, whereby both partners sexually desire one another and experience mutual embodiment:

‘in arousal, the unity between body and person is immediately experienced, and forms the living focus of an interpersonal response. But the body is not the object of this response. […] Arousal reaches through the body to the spirit which animates its every part’.[[40]](#footnote-40)

Thus, both partners feel themselves as being unified with their bodies, and are aroused by the other’s embodiment. The next stage in the course of desire is sexual intimacy: ‘the project of intimacy arises automatically, although not inevitably, from the bond of desire’.[[41]](#footnote-41) The form of intimacy to which Scruton refers is not only sexual or bodily intimacy, but emotional intimacy too: ‘it is a natural continuation of sexual pleasure to pursue such knowledge – to aim one’s words, caresses and glances, as it were, into the heart of the other, and to know him from the inside, as a creature who is part of oneself’.[[42]](#footnote-42)

The final stage in the course is erotic love, ‘a sense of commitment founded in the mutuality of desire’.[[43]](#footnote-43) Scruton thinks that this progression is also a natural one, for ‘love is the fulfilment of desire, and therefore love is its *telos*’.[[44]](#footnote-44) By ‘natural’ he does not mean: ‘occurs most frequently among humans’. If so, then his reasoning would be plainly false: a vast amount of sex which occurs between humans does not take the form he describes. Instead, he means ‘natural’ in the sense of ‘fulfilment’: just as anger is naturally fulfilled by vindication and repentance by the offender, sexual desire is naturally fulfilled by love.[[45]](#footnote-45) Furthermore, Scruton thinks that erotic love is naturally monogamous and must be so because love is prone to jealousy and jealousy can be destructive; ‘it is in the deepest human interest, therefore, that we form the habit of fidelity’, a habit he describes as ‘natural and normal’ but also ‘easily broken.’ He claims that no societies have ever favoured promiscuity or adultery, using this as evidence to claim that love can only flourish in a society in which sexual fidelity is cultivated.[[46]](#footnote-46)

The reason that love is the fulfilment of sexual desire is that love overcomes the vulnerability that we experience in sexual desire, ‘the vulnerability of one who has been overcome in his body by the embodied presence of another’.[[47]](#footnote-47) When we sexually desire someone, he argues, we are vulnerable because what we want requires their cooperation, (i.e. we want them to love and desire us). In love, we receive this cooperation and when our love leads to a ‘vow of loyalty’ we receive security that this cooperation will continue.[[48]](#footnote-48) Scruton suggests that sexual desire creates a kind of inner turmoil which can be assuaged only through erotic love: ‘erotic love provides the lover with the justification of his desire, and, if reciprocated, with the inner peace that rewards the trouble of desire.’[[49]](#footnote-49) This does not mean that love always follows from sexual desire but that love is ‘a natural continuation of the aim and project of desire’ and ‘is also to be recommended’.[[50]](#footnote-50) Thus, sex that does not follow the course he prescribes is unnatural and unrecommended. While he is not claiming that all sexual desire leads to love, he believes there is a ‘fittingness’ to the course he describes; this is where the normative aspect of his account comes in.

However, his account is more than just a recommendation, because he thinks the consequences of having sex which doesn’t follow his prescribed course of desire are severe. Impersonal sex, for Scruton, threatens both the social order and our personhood; two of the things we tend to value most in our lives. He recognises that during sex, we want to be appreciated for our bodies; to be desired ‘as a man’ or ‘as a woman,’[[51]](#footnote-51) but maintains that we do not want to be desired *only* as a body, ‘but for the person who is the body’.[[52]](#footnote-52) His main worry seems to be that when love, or feelings conducive to love, are absent during sex or sexual desire, it is the body of the other that is desired and not their ‘embodied existence’. Sex without love thus reduces us to less than a person and can lead to ways of interacting with each other which threaten the social order.

**3) Responses to Kant and Scruton**

Although the worry that we may end up treating someone as less than a person needs to be taken seriously, and it is true that the nature of sex makes it particularly easy to do this, advocating sex only within either monogamous marriage or a loving, monogamous, committed relationship is neither a necessary nor a sufficient response to this concern. Scruton makes descriptive claims about sex, and then moves to say that the ‘course of desire’ described by him is fitting and recommended, and that if we do not follow his course we will end up objectifying ourselves and others. However, his descriptive claims are debatable, since many people’s experiences of sexual desire do not fit them. Furthermore, even if he is right that sex is best when it leads to love or is part of a loving relationship, this does not entail that sex without love is morally condemnable or even that it is not good as sex. As Igor Primoratz writes, ‘B can be good, even if it is much less good than A’.[[53]](#footnote-53)

Primoratz observes that Scruton (though the same could be said of Kant as well) seems to suggest that we have only two options in sex:

‘either one “depersonalizes” the other, reduces the other to the mere “fleshy reality” of his or her body, virtually relates to him or her as a sex doll, or one relates to the other’s body as the embodiment of the unique, irreplaceable person he or she is, in a way that naturally evolves into intimacy and love’.[[54]](#footnote-54)

This picture is too simplistic: there are not only two stances towards people that we can adopt in the way we treat them during sex – either treating someone as an object, or treating them as the full and unique person they are. Instead, there are a number of different positions in between these two extremes and although some are more morally sound than others, what accounts for the variation is the amount of respect, care and attention we give to the other, not the degree to which we love them or whether we are married to them. People can, and do, have sex without loving or being committed to one another; and this sex may nevertheless be fulfilling and respectful of their personhood. Sometimes people do not want to ‘merge into one, body and mind’ with a sexual partner, but simply to enjoy a pleasurable physical experience together, exploring their own and another’s body sensually. Provided that it is fully consensual, it is far from obvious that this is necessarily immoral. As long as we pay attention to each other, are respectful, and care about each other’s needs and desires, we can adhere to the moral requirement of not treating another as a mere means to an end. We can treat someone as *a* person without treating them as a unique, irreplaceable individual.[[55]](#footnote-55) As Patricia Marino notes, in order to treat someone morally during sex, what is really important is *attentiveness*. She points out that strangers can be attentive towards each other: ‘strangers can have passionate sex in which they hang on to one another’s every word and glance’.[[56]](#footnote-56)

Furthermore, marriage is neither a necessary nor sufficient way out of the problem that sexual desire takes a person as its object. Kant’s idea of marriage is based on mutual surrender of independence and mutual possession of each other; indeed, he describes it as ‘the union of two persons of different sexes for lifelong possession of each other’s sexual attributes’.[[57]](#footnote-57) It might be objected that it is more common in the West today to see marriage as something like a committed, intimate relationship between people who care for each other and share their lives, but retain rights over themselves and their ‘sexual attributes’. Furthermore, Korsgaard points out that Kant acknowledges in the *Metaphysics of Morals* that, due to the unequal position of women in society, marriage actually further entrenches the inequality between the husband and wife, giving the man additional rights over the women. This would make sex within marriage even *more* degrading to women than sex outside of marriage. Nonetheless, Kant supposes that the inequality between husband and wife is not problematic if it is based only on men’s natural superiority over women.[[58]](#footnote-58) Thus, if we do not accept that men are naturally superior to women we might worry that actual marriages often do not involve the equal reciprocity Kant requires to legitimise sex. Indeed, even in societies where men do not officially have more rights than women, relationships between the genders often involve inequality. For example, as Marilyn Friedman points out, ‘women are socialised to shoulder more of the burdens of sustaining close relationships than are men’ and ‘usually bear a greater share of the emotional work needed for the lovers to survive as a couple’.[[59]](#footnote-59) In any case, whether the asymmetry in power falls along gender lines or not, it is unlikely that many marriages will be totally equal and reciprocal in the way that Kant envisions. This is not necessarily problematic for his argument if he is just considering an ideal, but it does entail that a lot of people, by Kant’s lights, are objectifying each other through sex, and this is unintuitive.

In addition, it is a little odd that Kant defines marriage partly by sex: ‘a marriage contract is *consummated* only *by conjugal sexual intercourse.*’[[60]](#footnote-60) If sex is a necessary feature of marriage and marriage is the solution to the problem of sex, then it seems like one of the main functions of marriage is to absolve us of our sexual sins. Moreover, the act of marriage itself is not sufficient to solve the problem of sexual objectification: what if two people marry each other so that they can use each other as sex objects? Even if the relationship is equal and reciprocal this would seem at least to be a less desirable relationship than one where the lovers were not married but loved and cared for each other. Further, Kant does not make it clear exactly what one has to do to surrender oneself in marriage in a way that makes sex morally permissible. Must one, for example, give up one’s rights over one’s bodily integrity? If so, marriage seems far too demanding and such a view could even legitimise marital rape.

Finally, although sexual desire does take a person *as its object* this is not equivalent to taking a person *as an object*. Kant argues that ‘as soon as anyone becomes an object of another’s appetite, all motives of moral relationship fall away’,[[61]](#footnote-61) but this is not always true: we can desire to have sex with someone whilst at the same time desiring to treat them morally. As long as we are not regarding the other person *solely* as an object of our desire, then we do not necessarily mistreat them.[[62]](#footnote-62)

In addition, love is by no means sufficient for treating another as a person in sex: sex within a committed loving relationship might be purely functional and one or both partners might be treated as less than a person. Marino notes that intimate relationships involve complex demands and it can be harder to refuse unwanted sexual advances in such contexts; we can be ‘coerced by intimacy.’[[63]](#footnote-63) Furthermore, ‘having a sexually selfish partner when one wants attention is probably more upsetting in cases of intimacy than in cases involving strangers.’[[64]](#footnote-64) Therefore, we have reason to doubt even the claim that sex with love and commitment is always morally better and more fulfilling than sex without love. We could alter the claim to say that what is morally required is that you treat the other *lovingly* in sex, but what ‘lovingly’ means is likely to reduce to treating them with care, attention and respect. Thus, one of the reasons Kant’s and Scruton’s arguments fail is because they have not provided a convincing conception of the relationship between love and sex. Kant does not seem to see the need to do this, as he believes that being in an equal marriage with someone is enough to make sex with them moral. Scruton provides a very detailed account of love, sex and the relationship between the two, but it is not always accurate and his normative conclusions do not follow from his descriptive claims.

To sum up: although sexual objectification is a problem and one which we need to take seriously, for we are all vulnerable to it and it can be potentially very harmful, neither Kant’s nor Scruton’s solution to the problem is persuasive. Neither monogamous love nor marriage is either necessary or sufficient to treat another person respectfully during sex and thus we cannot argue for the morality of monogamy from the claim that non-monogamous sex mistreats people.

**4) Sex outside of a monogamous marriage is wrong because it denies the good of marriage**

‘New natural law’ theorists have put forward a similar position to that of the Catholic Church with relation to love, sex and marriage, without postulating the existence of a god.[[65]](#footnote-65) New natural law arguments claim that all non-marital sex is morally wrong because it denies the good of marriage. I will discuss two formulations of this type of argument: those of John Finnis and Mary Catherine Geach.

Finnis’s starting point for his condemnation of non-monogamous, and indeed, non-marital sex, is the good of marriage. He argues that monogamous, heterosexual marriage is a ‘basic human good’, something that is ‘good not only for me but for anyone “like me” – a qualifier that turns out to include any human person.’ Other examples of such goods are: ‘life and health, knowledge, [and] friendship’. Marriage is this kind of good because it helps the husband and wife to flourish and to have a child which they subsequently help to flourish.[[66]](#footnote-66) Marriage has a dual purpose: ‘friendship and openness to procreation’ and sex ‘actualises, expresses and enables’ this dual purpose fully for the spouses.[[67]](#footnote-67) This is because sex is an expression of *fides,* ‘the commitment of each spouse to the other’[[68]](#footnote-68) and because it ‘culminates in the very kind of activity – ecstatic genital giving and genital accepting of semen – that sometimes results in generation.’ However, sex between a heterosexual married couple that cannot ‘result in generation’ because, for example, it is done at the wrong time of the month or the woman is post-menopausal is still ‘an act of the kind’ and so morally acceptable, as long as it is done for the sake of *fides*.[[69]](#footnote-69) Indeed, Finnis, like Kant, places sex at the centre of marriage, stating in a footnote that ‘the consent and commitment [in marriage] is to be open to the other’s wish (whether expressed or unexpressed) for such intercourse, provided there is not […] some sufficient reason not to engage in intercourse.’[[70]](#footnote-70) Nonetheless, sex for ‘pleasure alone,’ even within marriage, is wrong. It counts as being for ‘pleasure alone’ if:

‘either (i) one or both would be willing to have sex with some other attractive person then and there, or (ii) one spouse (or both) though resolved to have sex only “within marriage,” is so indifferent to the identity or personality of the other that the spirit of his or her engagement in their sexual activities is just as if he were doing it with a call-girl or she with a gigolo’.[[71]](#footnote-71)

Sex can be marital only if it ‘actualizes, expresses and enables the experiencing of a marriage’s freely chosen commitment to equality between the spouses, exclusivity, permanence and openness to procreation.’[[72]](#footnote-72) The last condition, ‘openness to procreation’, is presumably supposed to explain why it is acceptable to have sex during a time of the month when the woman is not fertile or if one partner is sterile, but not to use contraception. The couple might in some sense still be said to be ‘open to procreation’ if they have not actively tried to prevent it, regardless of whether or not they can, in fact, conceive.

All non-marital sex is morally wrong because it fails to appreciate that marriage is a basic human good, and ‘sets the wills of the choosers, willy nilly, against the good of marriage.’[[73]](#footnote-73) By this, Finnis means, as he explains in a footnote, that accepting non-marital sex — even if you do not engage in it yourself – is akin to denying the way that marital sex allows the partners to ‘actualize, express and enable them to experience their marriage.’ However, it is morally acceptable to choose ‘a worthwhile form of life which entails responsibilities incompatible with the commitment and responsibilities of marriage,’ because this does not involve denying the good of marriage.[[74]](#footnote-74) Thus, it is acceptable to join a convent because doing so makes no denial of the good of marital sex in general. Marriage must be heterosexual because same-sex relationships ‘have no tendency at all to generate children’ and so sex between people of the same sex can be, at most, ‘fictionally marital’[[75]](#footnote-75) and is thus immoral because it denies the good of marriage. Procreation is fundamental to marriage because children give us a reason to commit to others:

‘why undertake the burdens and unquantifiable risks involved in its defining commitments if not, in part, out of care for the future of one’s people […] and, in part and more immediately, out of an uncomplacent wonder at the reality of a new person’s coming to be.’[[76]](#footnote-76)

Also, marriage must be monogamous; Finnis seems to take this as fairly obvious, only very briefly mentioning that polygamy is wrong because of the inequality of spouses and the ‘fractured relations of siblings and half-siblings’ in a polygamous family.[[77]](#footnote-77)

Mary Catherine Geach also argues that marriage is a fundamental good, which she describes as a good that it is irreducible to other goods and worthwhile in itself.[[78]](#footnote-78) This is because marriage is both good for people and good for society. She argues against non-marital sex based on what she calls ‘first principles’, which are those that ‘a virtuous and sensible man’ would choose. Such a man ‘does not need to find any evil consequences for sodomy and adultery: he finds them evil in themselves.’[[79]](#footnote-79) However, she also argues against non-marital sex on consequentialist grounds, suggesting that it will lead to the decay of society. Thus, non-monogamous sex is wrong because it violates first principles as well as because it has harmful consequences.

Similarly to Finnis, she claims that sex has a ‘unitive-generative nature,’[[80]](#footnote-80) but she seems, in her paper, to find its procreative aspect far more important than its unitive function. Also in agreement with Finnis, she argues that sex can be morally acceptable only between a married heterosexual couple without contraception. Furthermore, moral sex does not aim at pleasure, because pleasure is good only if its object is also good, and the only good object for sex is heterosexual marriage which is open to procreation.[[81]](#footnote-81) Geach argues that, by denying the good of marriage through accepting non-marital sex, we damage ourselves and we damage society.[[82]](#footnote-82) We damage ourselves because non-marital ejaculation has no meaning and is thus defective and ‘destructive of one’s sense of the significance of the marriage act.’[[83]](#footnote-83) Denying that sex has a unitive-generative nature ‘is to damage one’s sense of the significance of human life’ because it is the act which creates human life.[[84]](#footnote-84) Sexuality can be, according to Geach, ‘an assertion of the significance and dignity of human life’, but if it is used incorrectly, then it is the opposite and, ‘where there is widespread abuse of human sexuality, life will come to seem meaningless and many will commit suicide.’[[85]](#footnote-85)

Furthermore, the acceptance of non-marital sex damages society. Geach is particularly concerned with the acceptance of homosexuality because, as she puts it, homosexuals do not just lust after other homosexuals, but after members of their own sex and so ‘the whole of society can get taken over, and become like a prison’ where ‘there is no separate class of homosexuals, but one undifferentiated lustful multitude.’[[86]](#footnote-86) However, Geach is also concerned with non-marital sex between men and women because it threatens paternity. She suggests that, ‘if the women whore around so that no one knows who his father is, then everything will decay.’[[87]](#footnote-87) This is because if men do not know who their children are, they will be less likely to work hard, not having the motivation of supporting their children. In addition, children will not ‘know in a father a person with the strength and the will to control them and to teach them respect for authority and for law,’ and so people will stop respecting the law and civilisation will decay. Geach does not acknowledge that women may, too, be able to teach their children to respect authority or that it is possible for a man to know who his children are without being married to their mother.

Thus, Geach, like Finnis, does not claim that everyone needs to get married to live morally, arguing that the unmarried celibate still ‘testifies to the significance of this activity as belonging to marriage […] and by honouring it he honours the dignity of human nature’.[[88]](#footnote-88) Neither Finnis nor Geach claim that you damage yourself if you do not get married, or even that your life is better if you get married, since they acknowledge that there is nothing wrong or defective with the life of the unmarried celibate. However, you do damage yourself and others if you have sex outside of the narrowly defined form of marriage they advocate.

**5) Responses to Finnis and Geach**

These arguments use highly emotive rhetoric[[89]](#footnote-89) and make many insufficiently backed-up assertions. Thus, they are entirely unconvincing as arguments against the immorality of sex outside of monogamous heterosexual marriage. Finnis and Geach both make at least four highly contentious claims:

1. Sex has a dual function which is procreation and to promote union between marital partners.
2. Sex which does not fulfil this dual function is morally wrong.
3. Heterosexual, monogamous, procreative marriage is a fundamental human good.
4. Procreation and child-rearing ought to take place only within heterosexual marriage.

With regards to (1), it is certainly not obvious that sex has a dual function, which is procreation and to promote *fides*. Indeed, beyond having an evolutionary function, which does not seem to be what Finnis and Geach are interested in, it is not clear what it would mean for sex to have a function; it might equally be true that sex has many functions or no function as such. Although sex is usually the means by which we procreate and it is, in some sense, the natural way to procreate, procreation is not a necessary consequence of sex and neither is sex necessary for procreation. Indeed, women are generally fertile for only 5-6 days a month so most sex occurs at times when procreation is not possible. Furthermore, sex naturally produces intense physical pleasure, and this is far more often the reason people engage in sex than procreation, so we could say that a function of sex is to provide people with pleasure. In any case, as Primoratz notes, ‘procreation is not *the* purpose of sex, since a purpose is always *somebody’s* purpose.’[[90]](#footnote-90) Therefore, we might say that sex can have the purpose of procreation and promoting *fides* if that is what the participants in question want, but that it can also have the purpose of producing pleasure, if that is what the participants want. Furthermore, the two ‘functions’ – procreation and promotion of *fides* might, at times be in conflict. Some partners will find sex without contraception very stressful because they do not want and/or cannot support more or any children. Thus, their sex will be open to procreation but not promote *fides.* Similarly, their sex might promote *fides* much better if they know that it cannot result in reproduction. This gives us further reason to question the ‘naturalness’ of the dual function of sex which they espouse.

Secondly, even if we concede that sex has a dual function, which is to promote *fides* and procreation in marriage, it does not automatically follow that we do anything morally wrong by having sex that does not fulfil this function, just as it is not morally wrong to use our hands for walking or our feet for painting. If no-one is being hurt, the sex is fulfilling and leaves all parties involved feeling cared for, respected and happy then it is difficult to see who is being wronged. Even if we conceded that sex was less fulfilling outside of marriage, this would give us only a prudential reason to keep sex within marriage, not a moral one. Similarly, it is difficult to find a relevant moral difference between the sex of the heterosexual sterile couple and the homosexual couple. Both could be having sex to promote *fides* and be ‘open to procreation,’ in the sense that they would like to have children, despite knowing that they actually cannot procreate.

Thirdly, both Finnis’ and Geach’s arguments rest on the idea that the type of marriage they describe is a ‘fundamental human good’. However, it is not entirely clear what they mean by this. As neither wants to assert that the unmarried celibate necessarily misses out on anything or does something wrong, they cannot mean that marriage is essential for human flourishing. Indeed, although it seems fair to say that some kind of intimate friendship is a fundamental human good, the kind of marriage advocated by both Finnis and Geach does not help all people, such as homosexuals, to flourish. Although, as I will argue in Chapters 4 and 6, there can be value in monogamy, there can be value in other ways of conducting intimate, loving and sexual relationships. Furthermore, monogamous, procreative, heterosexual marriage denies people of other fundamental human goods, such as sexual liberty or the ability to plan if and when to have children. It seems right that we have a basic human need for companionship and caring relationships, but it is plain that some people would lead a more flourishing and fulfilling life without a heterosexual, monogamous marriage that was constantly ‘open to procreation’. Geach gives us even less reason to accept that marriage is a fundamental good, claiming simply, without argument, that it is irreducible to other goods. Furthermore, Finnis and Geach paint a picture of romantic love as being a dutiful kind of committed relationship between a man and a woman. They both discuss the bond between husband and wife, but they do not consider what it *feels* like to love someone and how this motivates us to act in certain ways. Indeed, neither Finnis nor Geach really attempts to describe what love is or why it is valuable and important.

In addition, Finnis claims – as quoted above – that the marital commitment entails a willingness to have sex with one’s spouse unless one has ‘sufficient reason’ not to. However, the pressure to have sex within a marriage can lead to people having sex they do not really want, and this can be harmful in subtle ways, as described by Robin West in her paper, ‘The Harms of Consensual Sex’.[[91]](#footnote-91) For example, it can make people feel less confident and less able to express their wishes in other contexts, particularly if their partner is more sexually desirous and dominating than they are. Furthermore, insisting that sex be conducted without contraception can make sex stressful, as some people simply will not have the energy, finances, or desire to have a/another child. The argument that we have a duty to have sex without contraception in marriage when our partner wants, unless we have a good reason not to, can also lead to the excusal or denial of marital rape. Thus, although, there are many good things about marriage, it is not a ‘fundamental human good’ and neither is marital sex always morally superior to non-marital sex.

Finally, marriage is neither necessary nor sufficient for good parenting, as Finnis and Geach imply. Numerous studies show that children can thrive in families which don’t include heterosexual married parents.[[92]](#footnote-92) Research shows that stability and living in a low-conflict household are important for child welfare and development,[[93]](#footnote-93) but heterosexual monogamous marriage is not necessary for this kind of household. Continuity of care can be found in a wide range of parenting frameworks, including single-parent and polygamous households. In addition, as Elizabeth Brake notes, many groups of people are statistically more likely to be less than optimal parents than other groups, whether they are married or not, such as those who are socio-economically worse-off or who have very demanding jobs, but we do not consequently say that these people ought not to have children or, indeed, sex.[[94]](#footnote-94) Thus, a heterosexual marriage is not always the best place for children to be raised; a child might be better off living with only his mother or with his mother and her female partner than living with two heterosexual monogamous married parents who are not good at parenting.

**6) Conclusion**

To conclude this chapter: the moral arguments against monogamy I have considered here tend to assume too much and are ultimately unconvincing. The potential for sex to be immoral and harmful is exaggerated, as is the ability of the ‘one-size-fits-all’ solution to the problem – monogamous love and marriage. There are, of course, important moral questions relating to monogamy and these are augmented where children are involved. If a promise has been made to be monogamous it is usually wrong to break it without the consent of one’s partner; it is also immoral to deceive someone, hurt them unreasonably or treat someone unfairly. However, for monogamy *per se* to be morally significant, it would need to be immoral to be non-monogamous without any deception, cheating, promise-breaking or hurtfulness. It would need to be more moral to make the promise of monogamy than not to make it, if you are to have sex at all. Kant and Scruton suggest that non-monogamous sex is wrong because it objectifies the other, but as I have argued, this is not necessarily true. New natural law theorists, such as Finnis and Geach, argue that non-monogamous sex is wrong because it denies a fundamental human good – heterosexual, procreative, monogamous marriage. However, their arguments rely on untrue premises about sex, marriage and procreation.

A moral argument in favour of monogamy would be more convincing if it offered a detailed conception of a romantic relationship, showed why such a relationship promotes human flourishing more than being single or in a non-monogamous relationship, and why monogamy – including both emotional and sexual exclusivity – was a necessary part of it. I will attempt to arrive at a detailed conception of a romantic relationship in this thesis in order to see whether doing so leads to moral conclusions about monogamy. However, I will conclude that, although there can be value in monogamous romantic love, moral arguments against non-monogamy are still unpersuasive and that, consequently, monogamy should not be the dominant social norm that it currently is. I am going to take it as obvious that a homosexual relationship can involve the same kind of love as a heterosexual one, so I will not argue for this point in the thesis. I am also not going to explicitly discuss marriage or procreation because neither is necessary for a relationship to involve romantic love. I will be primarily interested in the question of whether monogamous romantic love is an intelligible aspiration; whether, and in what way, it adds value to our lives. In order to do this, I will consider: what romantic love is; how it differs to other kinds of love; what its relationship with sex is; and what role sexual exclusivity might play in a romantic relationship.

**Chapter Two: What can we learn about romantic love from Harry Frankfurt’s views of love?**

**1) Introduction**

In Chapter One, I explained that my point of departure for this thesis would be with moral arguments in favour of monogamy. I argued against the view that non-monogamous sex is wrong because it dehumanises and disrespects the other; and I argued that new natural law arguments, such as those put forward by Finnis and Geach are unpersuasive because they make dubious and insufficiently supported claims about sex, marriage and procreation. An argument in favour of monogamy as an intelligible ideal, moral or otherwise, will need to provide a detailed conception of what romantic love is, why it is valuable, and what the role of sex and sexual exclusivity is within a romantic relationship. Providing such a conception will be the goal of the rest of this thesis. However, though I will show that monogamy can be an intelligible aspiration, it is not necessarily morally superior to other ways of conducting sexual and loving relationships with others.

The first thing we need to do is to get a better handle on what romantic love is and what it entails. One of the questions we need to ask is whether love is an attitude, a feeling, a relationship, or something else. Another is why we bother loving at all, and why we love certain people romantically but not others. In this chapter I will examine of Harry Frankfurt’s ideas about love. This is because, although he has a very comprehensive and, at times, compelling, account of love, it does not readily apply to romantic love. Considering why this is, and how romantic love is different from other kinds of love, is important for understanding its relation to monogamy. Frankfurt describes love as a kind of arational attitude or ‘psychic condition’[[95]](#footnote-95) held towards another. For him, ‘love requires no reasons, and it can have anything as its cause.’[[96]](#footnote-96) The important thing is that we *do* love, as love provides us with reasons for living; ‘it is love that accounts for the value to us of life itself’.[[97]](#footnote-97) Alan Soble points out that ‘the title of Frankfurt's book is *The Reasons of Love*, not *The Reasons for Love*.’[[98]](#footnote-98) This is because, for Frankfurt, love itself is a source of reasons rather than love being a reasoned response to an object or person; ‘loving someone or something essentially *means* or *consists in,* among other things, taking its interests as reasons for acting to serve those interests.’[[99]](#footnote-99) According to him, love is selfless, involuntary and cannot be justified by the qualities of the beloved or by the relationship shared with her. Thus, we cannot provide justificatory reasons for why we love one person and not another.

Although the type of love in which Frankfurt is interested primarily is not romantic love,[[100]](#footnote-100) we can learn some important things about romantic love from his account, which will be useful when considering the value of monogamy later on. As Frankfurt assumes that the love he describes is the purest kind of love, he takes romantic love and friendship to be less authentic than parental love. I will suggest, conversely, that there is distinct value in romantic love which derives from the nature of the relationship on which it is based. Romantic love is parasitic on the romantic relationship; this makes it guided more by reason than familial love because we have greater choice over entry into and exit from romantic relationships. The difference between romantic love and friendship, as I shall argue later on, lies in the degree of exclusivity, commitment, and in the way in which the lovers[[101]](#footnote-101) share their identities and lives.

The structure of this chapter will be as follows: I will first briefly outline the rationalist account of love that Frankfurt rejects, and give some *prima facie* problems with this account that are to be expanded upon in the following chapter. I will then explain why Frankfurt rejects it and outline his account of what love is and why we need to love. After this exposition I will consider Frankfurt's theory as applied specifically to romantic love. An apparent strength of Frankfurt’s theory as an account of romantic love is that it appeals to the intuition that romantic love is reasonless and out of our control. However, this intuition may be misguided and thus cannot be used as evidence for his view that love is arational. I will then critically analyse Frankfurt’s four necessary features of love as applied to romantic love. These are: 1) love ‘consists most basically in a disinterested concern for the well-being or flourishing of the person who is loved’[[102]](#footnote-102); (2) love is ‘ineluctably personal’[[103]](#footnote-103); (3) ‘the lover identifies with his beloved’[[104]](#footnote-104) and (4) ‘love is not a matter of choice’.[[105]](#footnote-105) Finally, I will argue that Frankfurt fails to appreciate the distinct value of romantic love, which is not *less* valuable than parental love, just valuable in a different way.

**2) Love according to Frankfurt**

**2.1) A rationalist account of love**

I offer no more here than the briefest of sketches of what a rationalist account of love might look like, since the view will be examined in detail in the following chapter and my intention here is only to broadly outline the kind of view that Frankfurt rejects. A rationalist account of love proposes that love is a rational, reasoned response to the value of an object based on its properties. Love is, therefore, justifiable with reference to the value of the object. This type of account can be traced back to Plato. In the *Symposium*, Plato describes love as, in Donald Levy’s paraphrase, ‘the desire to possess what is beautiful.’[[106]](#footnote-106) There is a hierarchy of love based on the beauty or goodness of the object in question.[[107]](#footnote-107) Thus, love is better the more beautiful its object. As Gregory Vlastos puts it, for Plato, love is not aimed at individuals, but at clusters of properties.[[108]](#footnote-108) All love aims at the same thing: the possession of ‘true beauty’. Therefore, love can be justified or unjustified depending on how beautiful or good the beloved is.

A more recent example of a rationalist account of love is provided by Simon Keller, whose account I will discuss in the next chapter. He agrees that romantic love is a response to the properties of the beloved but suggests that the kinds of properties that are especially significant are those that make the beloved a good romantic partner to the lover. In contrast to Plato, Keller proposes that there is no single property, such as beauty, at which all love aims, but rather the properties of a person that make it rational to love them will depend on the lover. Keller gives the example of the property of ‘knowing how to treat the lover when she is in a bad mood,’ as an example of a relational property for which the beloved might be loved.[[109]](#footnote-109) Therefore the justification for loving a person will depend on how well he relates to the lover. Matilda can justify her love for Jason, not because of some generic qualities Jason has, but because of his qualities that make him the ideal romantic partner *for her.*

Another way to conceive of such accounts is to think about love in terms of *appraisal*. The lover appraises the object and love is a rational response to a positive appraisal. In Plato’s account, the lover loves the beloved because her appraisal of him has shown him to be an instance of ‘the good’. In Keller’s account, the lover’s appraisal of the beloved deems her to be an ideal romantic partner for him; thus he loves her. There are other ways of conceiving of the appraisal model; however the important thing to note for now is that Frankfurt rejects completely the idea that love is justified by a positive appraisal of the beloved. Love might be caused by a positive appraisal of the beloved, in the sense that it is the beloved’s qualities that make the lover first notice her; but this is not the same as the appraisal *justifying* the love.

**2.2) *Prima facie* problems with the rationalist account**

There are several *prima facie* problems with the rationalist account of love. Again, I only outline them here as I will discuss them at length in the following chapter. However, it is worth having them in mind whilst considering Frankfurt’s views in order to determine whether his account offers us a more realistic picture of love. Firstly, though its simplicity is appealing, the rationalist account makes it difficult to distinguish love from liking or admiration.[[110]](#footnote-110) The problem arises even in Keller’s more nuanced account: I might know that a certain person would make a wonderful romantic partner for me but this doesn’t automatically entail that I will love them. Secondly, if love can be justified by appeal to someone’s qualities, then why do we find it so difficult to explain why we love people, and why is it nearly impossible to persuade a person to love or not to love another? Thirdly, why does love not alter along with changes in the qualities of the beloved and fourthly, why do we not always 'trade-up', to use Robert Nozick's expression,[[111]](#footnote-111) when we find someone with better qualities? Finally, although I am primarily concerned with romantic love, we might note that the rationalist account is entirely inappropriate for familial love; I do not love my daughter because of her properties. For these reasons, we might conclude that love is not simply a rational, reasoned response to the qualities of a person.

**2.3) Why Frankfurt rejects appraisal as a feature of love**

Frankfurt concedes that love is sometimes a ‘response grounded in awareness of the inherent value of its object.’[[112]](#footnote-112) However, he argues that, though love may be stirred by the beloved’s qualities, those qualities do not justify the love felt by the lover. Appraisal is, therefore, not intrinsic to the nature of love. He writes, ‘people often think of what causes them to love something as giving them reasons to love it. However, loving is not the rationally determined outcome of even an implicit deliberative or evaluative process.’[[113]](#footnote-113) To be love, it cannot be the result of weighing up one’s options and making a decision. Furthermore, love might be aroused without a positive appraisal of the beloved taking place; indeed, the lover might not appraise the beloved at all, or may even appraise her negatively.

‘It is entirely possible for a person to be caused to love something without noticing its value, or without being at all impressed by its value, or despite recognizing that there really is nothing especially valuable about it. It is even possible for a person to come to love something despite recognising that its inherent nature is actually and utterly bad.’[[114]](#footnote-114)

If this is true, then it is not necessary to appraise the beloved positively, or even at all, in order to love them. Appraisal is, therefore, not a necessary condition of love. In addition, Frankfurt points out that a positive appraisal of on object or person is not a sufficient condition of love: ‘the fact that a person recognizes that an object is valuable or that it is good does not imply that he cares about it.’[[115]](#footnote-115) As stated above, liking or admiring someone does not entail that you will love them. As a positive appraisal is neither necessary nor sufficient for love, Frankfurt argues that the appraised value of the beloved does not provide the lover with a justificatory reason to love or to not love them.

Nonetheless, Frankfurt notes that the beloved is always valuable to the lover. However, he argues that this value ‘derives from and depends upon his love.’[[116]](#footnote-116) The beloved is valuable *because* he loves her, not because of any prior value she has. The question of whether love responds to the prior value of the beloved or the value of the beloved derives from the love bestowed on them has been conceived of as a ‘*Euthyphro* problem’ by Alan Soble.[[117]](#footnote-117) This problem is brought out nicely in a song from Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II’s production of *Cinderella:*

‘Do I love you because you're beautiful, or are you beautiful because I love you?  
Am I making believe I see in you a girl too lovely to be really true?  
Do I want you because you're wonderful, or are you wonderful because I want you?  
Are you the sweet invention of a lover's dream or are you really as beautiful as you seem?’[[118]](#footnote-118)

For Frankfurt, Cinderella is beautiful and wonderful to the prince *because* he loves her. Beauty is, for Frankfurt ‘in the eye of the beholder’; it is *bestowed* on the beloved by the lover. This is not to say that people do not have intrinsic value, but that love is not a response to it and rather creates value in people. What it means to love is, in part, to bestow value on another, *not* to appraise value already present.

**2.4) The need to love**

A rationalist opponent to Frankfurt might ask why, if love is arational, is it important at all? If we cannot explain the reasons for loving things and people, then what is the point in loving them in the first place? For the rationalist, what is valuable about love just are the features of the beloved that make her loveable. Therefore, the question of the point of love does not arise. The reasons for loving are out there in the world, in the properties of beloved people and objects. As Frankfurt rejects this claim he needs to explain why it is that we bother loving; what reason do we have for bestowing value onto the beloved? The answer is that we need to love.

Frankfurt argues that we need to have final ends to pursue in order to make sense of our actions and to make them meaningful. Loving things and people gives us final ends that we cannot help having and that we care about non-instrumentally.[[119]](#footnote-119) Love gives us goals to work towards, and reasons for our actions. Without love, we would be bored with life and find little pleasure in it. A life without any cares whatsoever (even to continue living, for example) seems unthinkable. However, a life without final ends and only instrumental cares is also a depressing life indeed. If we had no final ends, then everything we wanted would be ‘just for the sake of another thing.’[[120]](#footnote-120) For example, I would care about getting an education, in order to get money, in order to buy lots of clothes, in order to impress people and the list would go on and on. There would be no end point in sight, no source of meaning, only a series of actions, each being done for the next thing. Such a life could, as Frankfurt puts it, ‘keep a person busy,’ but it would not be fully satisfying ‘because it would provide no sense of genuine achievement.’[[121]](#footnote-121) Conversely, if I love my child, then I care about working so that I have enough money to support her, but I do not care about her for the sake of anything other than herself; this love thus provides structure and meaning to my life, providing me with a ‘final end’: an ‘ultimate reason’ for many of my actions and cares. Frankfurt suggests that if we have no final ends, and each end is achieved only in order to achieve some other end, nothing we do will have any ‘real point’; nothing will ever feel finished and ‘the actions we perform will truly seem empty and vain to us, and we will tend to lose interest in what we do.’[[122]](#footnote-122) Thus love, construed as involuntary, disinterested concern, is essential to avoid boredom and depression.

In addition, we would not have a continuous nature if we did not care (non-instrumentally) about anything. ‘Caring is indispensably foundational as an activity that connects and binds us to ourselves. It is through caring that we provide ourselves with volitional continuity, and in that way constitute and participate in our own agency.’[[123]](#footnote-123) We create ourselves through identifying with what we care about. For example, by accepting that I love football and desiring that I continue to love football, I become a person with a football loving identity. I would not have a constant identity if I did not love anything; my desires and actions would not make sense or have any kind of non-arbitrary connection between them. As Frankfurt puts it, the person with no final ends ‘would be uninvolved in his own life: unconcerned with the coherence and continuity of his desires, neglectful of his volitional identity, and in this respect indifferent to himself.’[[124]](#footnote-124) What a person loves defines her; we think about people in terms of what they love, be it cricket, the queen, or their partner. As Frankfurt puts it: ‘the necessities of love, and their relative order or intensity, define our volitional boundaries. They mark our volitional limits, and thus they delineate our shapes as persons.’[[125]](#footnote-125) By ‘volitional limits’ Frankfurt means that love marks out what is possible for us to desire and to be motivated by. The limits love puts upon us concern what we can *bring ourselves to do*. For example, if I did not love my country it would be impossible for me to be motivated by nationalistic pride to take part in the invasion of another country. I can, of course, physically still take part in the invasion and might do if, for example, another love of mine compels me to, such a love of war. Nonetheless, volitional limits do seem to impose a kind of necessity on us. Thus, love has a fundamental place in our lives, not only in determining how we *act,* but in determining who we *are.*

Consequently, we may not have reasons for loving things in particular, but we do have reasons to love in general. This is significant, since it means that we have reason to bestow non-instrumental value on objects that would otherwise have only instrumental value to us. It has been taken by some[[126]](#footnote-126) to imply that we should simply care about whatever we can, for caring about *anything* is better than caring about nothing. In Frankfurt’s ‘Reply to Susan Wolf’,he addresses this claim. He suggests that although, ‘loving something is necessarily [...] better than not loving it and, of course, better than loving nothing’ this does not entail that we ought to ‘love whatever we can.’ [[127]](#footnote-127) This is because there are other factors to take into account which might make loving something bad for someone, such as whether one’s new object of love will clash with what else she loves. For example, it would be a bad idea for a mother who loved her children to start to love a man who detested and was abusive towards children. However, Frankfurt warns us against making value judgments regarding what is worth caring about. For example, he makes the controversial claim that although Hitler caring about Nazism was bad for the world, it was probably better for Hitler than caring about nothing or indeed, than caring about something else, such as art.[[128]](#footnote-128) This is because, as Hitler was only mediocre at art, his love of Nazism enriched his life far more than loving art would have done. The only way to judge whether or not it would be good for a person to care about something is to consider whether it fits with the other things that they care about. Incidentally then, as long as we love *something* and that something does not make our lives more difficult, then we have achieved our aim of avoiding boredom and emptiness. Thus, by focussing on the reasons to love in general, rather than the reasons to love particular people, Frankfurt does not explain why we tend to pursue romantic love and often favour this kind of love over other kinds, such as the love of objects, events or places. In the next section I will look in more detail at what love means for Frankfurt before assessing his theory in relation to romantic love in particular.

**2.5) The nature of love for Frankfurt**

Frankfurt writes that there are ‘four main conceptually necessary features of love of any variety.’[[129]](#footnote-129) In this section I will briefly explain each feature; I will return to them later to discuss problems with them as features of romantic love.

*i) Love ‘consists most basically in a disinterested concern for the well-being or flourishing of the person who is loved’*[[130]](#footnote-130)

According to Frankfurt, the only interest of love is to serve and promote the well-being of the beloved, and so to love someone for the hope of personal gain is not real love. The beloved is a Kantian ‘end in itself’; a ‘final end’ in Frankfurt’s words. Love requires valuing its object as an end rather than a means; so if Matilda loves Jason for his money, she does not really love himat all as her concern for him is really a self-interested concern for wealth. She cares for him only as a means by which to improve her own life, not for his well-being in itself. To love, Frankfurtian style, one must ‘forget oneself’ and give love to the beloved ‘as a gift,’ as Gary Foster puts it.[[131]](#footnote-131)

Frankfurt acknowledges that an objection might be that love cannot be entirely disinterested because ‘the beloved provides the lover with an essential condition for achieving an end – loving – that is intrinsically important to him.’[[132]](#footnote-132) As I explained in the previous section, Frankfurt thinks that love is necessary to enjoy living. Therefore, loving could be construed as self-interested because the beloved provides a means to prevent the lover from living without love. However, Frankfurt does not think this presents a problem for his view because the lover can only accrue the benefits of loving by loving disinterestedly: ‘what serves the self-interest of the lover is nothing other than his selflessness’.[[133]](#footnote-133) Although loving the beloved may serve the lover’s desire to love, she can do this only by being selflessly devoted to the beloved. Thus, in a sense, Frankfurt seems to be advocating a kind of self-deception. The lover must make herself believe she is being selfless in loving her beloved in order to serve her own interests.

*ii) Love is ‘ineluctably personal’[[134]](#footnote-134)*

One might think that a disinterested concern for the beloved is really *agape,* a selfless, unconditional love for humanity. However, Frankfurt emphasises that the kind of love in which he is interested is the love for irreplaceable individuals, not ‘instances of a type’.[[135]](#footnote-135) Thus, if she really loves Jason, Matilda must love him as the particular person he is, not because he is a political activist with a good sense of humour. Furthermore, if she loves him, she would not love a substitute;[[136]](#footnote-136) if she met Jason’s even funnier and more politically active brother, Jerry, she would not just dump Jason in favour of Jerry. Even an identical duplicate of Jason would not do.

This links to Frankfurt’s rejection of the ‘appraisal model’ of love. He elucidates what it means to love something as a particular in his essay, ‘On Caring’:

‘The reason is that he loves it in its essentially irreproducible *concreteness*. The focus of a person’s love is not those general and hence repeatable characteristics that make his beloved *describable.* Rather, it is the specific particularity that makes his beloved *nameable* – something that is more mysterious than describability, and that is in any case manifestly impossible to define.’[[137]](#footnote-137)

What makes something or someone nameable is simply what makes them distinct from others; but this distinctiveness does not depend on their characteristics. I would still be the discrete entity, *Natasha McKeever*, if I lost my memory, and my personality and appearance changed completely, though I would share few characteristics with my former self. Indeed, if a stranger was given two descriptions of me: one as I am now, and one from when I was one day old, they would probably not think the descriptions were of the same person. However, the ‘nameable’ part of me is the same; it is just my ‘describable’ bit that is different. Similarly, a duplicate of me would share my ‘describable’ bit, but not my ‘nameable’ bit. My characteristics are irrelevant to my nameability, though they are what make me describable. Therefore, if we love people on the basis of their nameability rather than their describability, we are unable to articulate the reasons for loving them beyond saying ‘because they are them.’ A rationalist account of love, on the other hand, focuses on the describable; if asked ‘why do you love her?’ the rationalist would respond with a description of the beloved.

*iii) ‘The lover identifies with his beloved’[[138]](#footnote-138)*

To identify with someone, you take their interests as your own. When they achieve success, you share in their joy; when they suffer a loss, you share in their misery. This helps to explain how love is more than just disinterested concern or caring. When I give money to a homeless person because I care about her suffering I may be (if I don’t gain anything from the transaction) showing disinterested concern for her. However, I don’t take her interests as my own; indeed I might completely put her out of my mind after I have made the donation. Therefore, my motivation for giving the money is not love, as construed by Frankfurt. This links to Frankfurt’s second feature of love, since you can only identify with a person or a thing if they are a particular, rather than merely an instance of a type. When I give money to the homeless person, it might be that I am giving money to her because I want to give to *a* homeless person, rather than to her in particular. My concern is for ‘the homeless’; any homeless person would have done just as well. In such a case, my motivation is disinterested concern for the homeless, but it is not love because it is not personal and does not involve identification.

Incidentally, identification seems to conflict with Frankfurt’s first feature, that love is disinterested concern. This is because, in a way, the lover has expanded her interests: taking the beloved’s interests as her own could be construed as simply acquiring more interests and thus more opportunity to acquire benefits. Matilda wants good things to happen to Jason, in part, because this will make *her* happy. I return to this point later on. A second point to note for now is that it is not possible to identify with non-living beings because they do not have interests. I might feel sad when my beloved violin gets crushed by a car but this is not because I am identifying with the violin; it is because I am no longer able to use it. Thus, it seems that we can only have non-instrumental concern for people with interests of their own and therefore that Frankfurt’s account might only apply to people (though he does not see this as a consequence of his theory).

*iv) ‘Love is not a matter of choice’*[[139]](#footnote-139)

For Frankfurt, ‘love is not a matter of choice but is determined by conditions that are outside our immediate voluntary control.’[[140]](#footnote-140) This is, for Frankfurt, a necessary feature of love and caring. In ‘The Importance of What We Care About,’Frankfurt argues that if we did not accept that caring was outside of our voluntary control, we would be unable to explain why we cannot just stop caring about something merely at will, why it imposes a kind of necessity upon us*.*[[141]](#footnote-141) He argues that caring about something imposes a ‘volitional necessity’ on us. As described above, a volitional necessity differs from a causal or logical necessity in that it does not limit our physical power to be able to do X; rather, it limits our will, making it impossible to bring oneself to do X.[[142]](#footnote-142) For example, a mother might find she just cannot bring herself to turn her criminal son into the police, because she loves him, even though she knows that he really ought to be incarcerated. This impossibility is a volitional necessity, though not a causal or logical one. She knows that she *could* physically turn him in, and believes that she ought to, but she cannot make herself *want* to do this enough to actually do it. Indeed, in order to be able to bring ourselves to make a change in our lives, we have to change what we care about; for example, I will not become thinner until I care more about being slim than about eating cake.

However, Frankfurt argues that the imposition of volitional necessities does not make love an infringement on our autonomy, since although we cannot choose what we love or how that love will make us want to act, the constraints on our choices are our own; they both constitute and are created by our will.[[143]](#footnote-143) Thus, love is involuntary in the sense that we cannot consciously bring it about or stop it, but it is not like an unwanted addiction. Rather, love is intertwined with our will: ‘since love is itself a configuration of the will, it cannot be true of a person who does genuinely love something that his love is entirely involuntary.’[[144]](#footnote-144) What does Frankfurt mean by ‘a configuration of the will?’ In an earlier essay, ‘Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,’ Frankfurt explains in detail how an action or emotion can be outside of our immediate control yet still be a product of our free will. He explains the concepts of ‘second-order desires,’ which are the desires to have or not to have other desires,[[145]](#footnote-145) and second-order volitions, which are the desires for desires to be one’s will or for other desires to be effective or ineffective. [[146]](#footnote-146) For example, consider a woman who wants to want to perform an act of kindness for her child but is also angry with him for being naughty; she has conflicting first order desires: to be kind to her child and to teach him a lesson. Perhaps she is experiencing a second-order desire to want to be kind to her child, but she has a second-order volition that this desire be ineffective. She will not be content until all of these desires become aligned. The configuration of the will is the arrangement of one’s second-order desires and volitions which are outside of one’s direct control but which create and influence one’s first-order desires, and it is love which makes up our configuration. Thus love is involuntary in a sense, but voluntary in a more important way: it underlies what voluntary choices we can make.

When we are wholehearted we identify with the configuration of our will and do not try to change our first-order desires or have conflicting ones. ‘[Wholehearted love] expresses what we, as active individuals, cannot help being [...] Moreover, wholehearted love expresses – beyond that – what we cannot help wholeheartedly wanting to be.’[[147]](#footnote-147) When we act wholeheartedly we experience ourselves as acting freely. Thus, the woman who genuinely feels no anger or resentment towards her naughty child, but only the wholehearted desire to be kind to him because of her wholehearted love for him will experience her kindness towards him as a free action.

Controversially, Frankfurt argues that as everyone’s ‘configuration of the will’ is different, there can be no normative, rational evaluation of how one should live one’s life, or indeed, whom one should love.[[148]](#footnote-148) Frankfurt’s example of Hitler, previously discussed, highlights this point: as long as Hitler identified with his love of Nazism, then loving Nazism was not bad for him. Furthermore, as long as your second-order desires and volitions are in line with your first-order desires you are enjoying ‘as much freedom as it is possible for us to conceive.’[[149]](#footnote-149) That is, the freest we can hope to be is to want to love the things that we do love and to have the motivations to love that we want. In other words, if you *identify* with your will, as opposed to finding your will conflicted, then you are acting freely.

To sum up, love is involuntary in the sense that one cannot make oneself love or not love another merely by willing it be so.[[150]](#footnote-150) This is because we cannot control our second-order desires and volitions; but this does not make us unfree or make love involuntary in the way that heroin addiction is. There is a more important conception of voluntariness that does not just mean being totally unconstrained, but rather means identifying with one’s second-order desires and volitions. When one does this, one acts wholeheartedly and Frankfurt thinks that wholeheartedness is, *ceteris paribus*, more desirable than ambivalence[[151]](#footnote-151) and is, therefore, something towards which we ought to aim.

In the next part of this chapter I consider Frankfurt’s views applied to romantic love. I begin with why we might think Frankfurt’s theory fits common conceptions of romantic love and then consider some problems we encounter when applying it to romantic love.

**3) Frankfurt and romantic love**

**3.1) Frankfurt’s theory is supported by the intuition that romantic love can feel reasonless**

There is a commonly held intuition that love is reasonless, arational, out of our control, that it can just take hold of us, leaving us resolutely in its grasp. This is illustrated in the quotation by the writer Anaïs Nin: ‘do not seek the because – in love there is no because, no reason, no explanation, no solutions.’[[152]](#footnote-152) This intuition is most widely written about and discussed with relation to romantic love; though other kinds of love – familial love and friendship, for example, can feel reasonless too. Indeed, love for objects, places, and pieces of art can all feel arational. This intuition supports Frankfurt’s theory as it suggests that the claim that love need not have reasons is true. As my main focus is on romantic love, I will discuss the apparent arationality of romantic love. Firstly, we might note, as John Shand and many others have done, that we use the phrase to *‘fall* in love’ which implies ‘a non-rational event one is subject to and does not deliberately, let alone rationally, control.’[[153]](#footnote-153) Once a person has begun to fall it does not make sense to ask them to stop, however good one’s reasons for asking them to may be. There are at least two further sources of evidence for the intuition that love is reasonless: a) we find it difficult, if not impossible, to explain why we love people; b) it is near impossible to persuade someone to love or not to love another. I will now consider each of these in turn.

**3.1.1) Explaining Love**

We often have trouble explaining why we love someone and sometimes find it an inappropriate question to ask a person why they love another.[[154]](#footnote-154) As Robert Solomon notes, ‘most people are quite incoherent if not speechless about producing reasons for loving a particular person’.[[155]](#footnote-155) To respond to the question ‘why do you love him?’ with ‘I just do’, or ‘I know how I feel’[[156]](#footnote-156) is an oft-heard and reasonable reply. Indeed, to answer the question with a list of the person’s qualities could imply that you don’t really understand what love is or that you just don’t really love her. Shand makes an even stronger claim: ‘starting to give or even consider reasons for loving someone, and certainly presenting them to the beloved, may be seen as proof that one does not love them.’[[157]](#footnote-157) This might be a bit strong, but if your partner told you they were trying to work out the reasons why they loved you, you might reasonably take this to mean that they are unsure whether they love you at all. Conversely, to answer a question ‘why do you hate her?’ or ‘why do you admire her?’ with ‘I don’t know I just do’ seems inappropriate and unreasonable. As Soble highlights, ‘“agapic” hate looks pathological, and we would help someone experiencing it to get over it.’[[158]](#footnote-158) We expect people to have reasons for admiring and hating others and, if they do not, we tend to think that they do not understand what it means to admire or hate another. Thus, love seems to be a different *kind* of emotional response to a person than these more reasoned responses.

**3.1.2) Persuading to love or not to love**

In addition, we can’t be persuaded to love someone or to stop loving them, whereas it does seem possible to persuade someone to admire or dislike another. I might say ‘you should admire Jemma because she’s intelligent, thoughtful, has great values and has made it all on her own’ and there is at least some chance that you will agree. However, I can’t persuade you to love her. This is, in part at least, because love does not seem to respond to reasons in the way that other emotional responses to people do. I might suggest that you try to fall in love with a mutual friend who has many qualities I know you value, but I know that the most I could persuade you to do would be to spend time with her and try to get to know her. Indeed, many people have had the experience of really wanting, but failing, to feel romantic love for someone, perhaps their spouse whom they no longer love or a friend whom they know would make a great romantic partner. As Ty Landrum notes:

‘the compulsion to intimacy is not something that one can simply call up or discipline oneself to achieve […] a normative demand to feel the compulsion of intimacy toward persons for whom one simply does not feel that compulsion is an absurd demand.’[[159]](#footnote-159)

Further, though we do sometimes try to persuade our friends and family *not* to love those whom we believe to be wrong for them, we seldom succeed. I may think that it is very unfortunate that you love your aggressive and dishonest wife and suggest that you remove yourself from a relationship from her, but even if I succeed in persuading you to leave the relationship, I can’t stop you from loving her. This is because your desire to continue loving her is, in Frankfurt’s terms, a second-order desire over which you can’t directly control. As Solomon observes, ‘it is by now a trite movie scene, where the protagonist writes down in one column fifty reasons why he should leave his lover, and then in the other column simply writes “I love her!” – and that clinches the decision.’[[160]](#footnote-160) Part of the reason you can’t be persuaded not to love your wife is because the simple fact that you do love her seems to override all the other reasons that I could give you not to love her. Frankfurt’s view can easily explain this seeming irrationality: you can see all the reasons not to love her, but, nonetheless, you continue to love her because your love for her is not a matter of choice.

Frankfurt’s distinction between the nameable and the describable is a possible way of illuminating the unexplainable element of love. Both of the above observations – that we find it difficult to explain the reasons why we love the people we do and why it is almost impossible to persuade someone to love another – seem to imply that love is not based on the describable aspects of a person as other responses to people’s perceived value are, such as admiration or hatred. It is not usually difficult to explain why we admire or hate someone because we can simply respond with a list of the qualities of the person that justify the attitude towards her. In other words, we can *describe* the admirable or hateful features of that person and this will be sufficient to explain our feelings about her. Admiration and hatred are responses to the appraised value of the object. On the other hand, we tend to feel that no description of a person could fully account for why we love them. As Shand points out, though when trying to explain why I love my beloved I may begin by describing them, in the end I will feel that my description provides an insufficient explanation and l will have to say that I ‘just do’ love them.[[161]](#footnote-161) As explained earlier, the ‘nameable’ aspect of a person is something over and above the totality of their properties and so if we love people for their nameability, no description of them will be able to fully account for the love. In addition, Frankfurt’s distinction between first and second-order desires and volitions provides another answer to the question of why love seems mysterious. If love is a configuration of our second-order desires and volitions then it is outside of our immediate cognitive understanding and control.

**3.2) An objection: Can we trust our intuitions about love?**

A problem with using our intuition that love is reasonless to support Frankfurt’s theory is that it may be misguided. We might find it difficult, even impossible, to explain why we love a person, or to persuade someone to love another, but that does not render love unexplainable. Perhaps we just don’t try hard enough to find the reasons or don’t want to access them, and the intuition that love is reasonless is based partly on a self-imposed delusion. Shand suggests that, ‘we want love to be both a non-rational occurrence beyond reason and something normative such that the indications of reasons are relevant to determining and assessing it.’[[162]](#footnote-162) We want the lover’s love for us to be freely given, for them to have freely chosen us, but we don’t want the lover to be able to choose *not* to love us. This is what I will refer to as the paradox of love. As Shand notes, ‘in order for love to exist and work, they [the lovers] tell themselves these two contradictory things, whilst ignoring the contradiction.’[[163]](#footnote-163) Neil Delaney suggests that we need to do this because of our conflicting needs for stability in love and for the lover to be discerning in whom they love. The lover’s love means less to the beloved if it is not based at all on their qualities, if the lover could love anyone else just as much. At the same time though, the beloved wants to know that they will still be loved if they lose some or even all the properties for which the lover loves them and to know that the lover will not ‘trade-up’ for someone with better qualities.[[164]](#footnote-164) To deal with these conflicting needs, we sometimes think of love as being reasonless, and thus unconditional, and at other times we think of it as having reasons, and thus being discerning and conditional.[[165]](#footnote-165)

Nevertheless, even if it is not true that we delude ourselves in this way, we might just find it so difficult to articulate the reasons for love that we give up. This does not make love arational and unjustifiable, just very hard to put into words and to rationalise. As Solomon suggests, the reasons for love might be ‘inarticulate and sub-conscious’. They may be ‘developed through a life-time of forgotten experiences, bad memories, cultivated and accidental habits.’[[166]](#footnote-166) To compare: my preference for jazz music over heavy-metal might appear arational and any explanation I try to give for my preference may end with me saying ‘I just do’; but this does not mean that there are not a whole host of reasons which collectively justify my preference that I am unable to remember or articulate or have just not considered. If I really put my mind to it, perhaps I would be able to provide a full explanation for my preference. I may also be able to change my preference if I really wanted to. Indeed, though we do have an intuition that love is reasonless, there is also a strong intuition that there are reasons for love. As Solomon puts it:

‘the very notion of “reasons for love” strikes many people as unintelligible.[...] But love without reason, love without reasons, is an unintelligibility too, of a different kind, suggesting psychotic obsession, blind, blithering, helpless attachment, or mere frivolousness.’[[167]](#footnote-167)

We might think that the lover who cannot provide *any* reason to love her beloved does not really love her but is rather infatuated by or obsessed with her. Further, as will be discussed later on, it is not impossible for someone to stop loving her beloved at will if she really wants or needs to.

It should be noted that Frankfurt does not himself use our intuitions about love as evidence for his theory as I have here. Nonetheless, my intention in this section has been merely to point out that if one reads Frankfurt and finds him to appeal to their intuitions about romantic love, one should be wary about concluding that this makes him right. This does not mean that we should totally ignore our intuitions about love, but that we ought not to rely on them as decisive evidence for a theory of love.

**4) Problems with Frankfurt’s four necessary features of love as features of romantic love**

In this section I return to Frankfurt’s ‘four conceptually necessary features of love’ and consider problems with them as features of romantic love in particular. Frankfurt would probably agree with me on some of the points I make, since he is clear that the kind of love in which he is interested is not romantic. However, my reason for discussing his views with relation to romantic love is to show two things. Firstly, I want to show that there are different kinds of love, and, in particular, that romantic love is a distinct kind of love. Secondly, I hope to show that romantic love is no less valuable than other kinds of love, though Frankfurt implies that it is. I will remain agnostic on how well his theory works for other kinds of love since this question is not directly relevant to my thesis.

1. *Love ‘consists most basically in a disinterested concern for the well-being or flourishing of the person who is loved’[[168]](#footnote-168)*

It is a key feature of Frankfurtian love that it is selfless and disinterested. The beloved must be loved for her own sake, not because the lover will gain anything through loving her. However, romantic lovers do tend to benefit from their love and the benefit the love gives them is part of their reason for loving. If loving consists in caring for the well-being of the beloved and wanting to contribute to it, then the lover will be happy when the beloved is happy, since her loving desires have been fulfilled. This means that serving the beloved’s interests necessarily serves the self-interest of the lover. Indeed, this seems to be exactly what Frankfurt means when he says that the lover identifies with the beloved. This is, of course, not true only for romantic love. Parents, for example, are usually happy when their children are well and happy and there does not seem to be any problem with this. If their children’s happiness did not make them happy we might question whether they really loved them at all (with some exceptions, such as if their children were made happy by acting in a way that conflicted with the parent's moral values). Nevertheless, Frankfurt could respond to this objection as he does to the objection that love serves the lover’s need to love: since the lover’s aim is to serve the beloved’s needs disinterestedly, whether or not she is made happy through doing so is beside the point.

However, romantic love is more self-interested than familial love, and perhaps than friendship love, because we expect more from it; we want it to make us happy and we demand reciprocity from it. The romantic lover is not content to love her beloved from afar; she wants to be loved back and she wants to be near her beloved. Indeed, knowing that one’s beloved wants to contribute to one’s well-being seems to provide a reason to love one’s beloved in return. People seek out romantic love for the reason that it will contribute to their own well-being and happiness. Of course, people don’t have children just so that they can selflessly dote on them either; in most cases, parents hope that having children will enrich their lives. However, parents are willing to tolerate a lot more from their children, in some cases an unlimited amount of misery, before abandoning them. Romantic partners, on the other hand, are more ready to leave each other if the relationship no longer makes them happy, and many of us agree that this is the right thing to do.[[169]](#footnote-169) Even those who believe you should marry for life would usually believe there are more circumstances in which it is acceptable to leave your spouse than your child. As love depends to an extent on the relationship, leaving a relationship with someone is akin to saying you no longer want to love them. Similarly, as friendship is usually less demanding than romantic love and more flexible, we are sometimes willing to tolerate more from our friends than our romantic lovers. Consequently, Frankfurt does not think that romantic love fits the ideal of love that he is investigating.

‘Relationships that are primarily romantic or sexual do not provide very authentic or illuminating paradigms of love as I am construing it. Relationships of those kinds typically include a number of vividly distracting elements, which do not belong to the essential nature of love as a mode of disinterested concern, but that are so confusing that they make it nearly impossible for anyone to be clear about just what is going on.’[[170]](#footnote-170)

Frankfurt provides a few examples of what such ‘distracting elements’ might be later in his book: ‘a hope to be loved in return or to acquire certain other goods that are distinct from the well-being of the beloved – for instance, companionship, emotional and material security, sexual gratification, prestige, or the like.’[[171]](#footnote-171) The suggestion is that there are self-interested desires and motivations intrinsic to romantic love, and these render it an impure or inauthentic kind of love.

I agree with Frankfurt that romantic love is full of self-interested desires, but I argue that these are part of what gives it its distinctive value. Romantic love is not ‘wholly unaccompanied by an interest in any other good’, but we don’t want it to be, because then it would lose its value as romantic love. The particular value of *agape* and parental love lies, in part, in their unconditionality and disinterested concern. The particular value of romantic love – and, to some extent, friendship – on the other hand, lies, in part, in its conditionality and contribution to our self-interest. This is partly because of the reciprocal nature of romantic love. That is, even if it is unrequited, romantic love always hopes for reciprocation and, therefore, to receive something in return. On Frankfurt’s view, this makes it an inauthentic kind of love for, ‘love does not necessarily include a desire for union of any other kind. It does not entail any interest in reciprocity or symmetry in the relationship between lover and the beloved.’[[172]](#footnote-172) However, someone who does not even *desire* for their love to be returned does not romantically love their beloved. As Foster argues:

‘we may not love someone simply because we want our love reciprocated, but reciprocation (at some point) or the hope of such is a necessary part of the development of romantic love […] the man who loves a woman who in return, does not acknowledge his existence, can fairly be said to possess an illusory love.’[[173]](#footnote-173)

On the other hand, the mother who loves her son, despite him not knowing she exists, does not seem to possess only illusory love. Foster points out that for Frankfurtian love based solely on bestowal of value, reciprocation is not important, ‘the parent or the Christian God does not require reciprocation.’[[174]](#footnote-174) However, ‘romantic love and friendship are relational and rely on a dynamic of giving, receiving and sharing.’[[175]](#footnote-175) This is because of the nature of the relationships on which the love is based. Parental love and God’s love do not depend upon a reciprocal relationship. Romantic love and friendship, on the other hand, ideally involve love between equals and thus require a measure of give and take. Of course, it would be an unusual parent who did not desire that their child loved them back, but parents are far more likely to tolerate their children not reciprocating their love and continue to love them regardless than romantic lovers are.

However, although it is reasonable to desire, indeed expect, romantic love to make the lover happy, the lover must also care about the well-being of her beloved. If this was not the case, then it would not be an instance of real love, for the desire to care for the beloved’s well-being is a minimal requirement of love. Thus, although romantic love does not consist in totally disinterested concern, it necessarily involves caring for the beloved. Therefore, the kinds of interests that are served through love must be those that make the beloved happy or benefit her in some way too. For example, it is reasonable for Jason to love Matilda, in part, because being with her makes him happier and feel more confident, as long as he cares that her being with him also makes her feel happier and more confident. Conversely, it does not seem like an instance of real love if your ‘love’ for another makes you happy but them afraid, for example if you are stalking them, even if stalking them makes you very happy. Therefore, to care about the well-being of the beloved entails wanting to be good for them and so feeling happy when we are good for them. We, therefore, want their love for us to be at least partly self-interested so that our aim of making them happy can be fulfilled. We want them to love us because loving us makes them happy and this will, in turn, serve our own self-interest through seeing our project – making our beloved happy – realised. It will also serve our self-interest by boosting our self-esteem through having someone hold us in such high regard. This distinguishes romantic love from parental love; although we want our parents to hold us in high esteem, we tend to assume that they will continue to love us even if they cannot stand to be around us.

For these reasons, romantic love consists less of disinterested concern than parental love. Frankfurt agrees but implies that this makes it less valuable than parental love, which he claims is the purest kind of love.[[176]](#footnote-176) I suggest, conversely, that the value is simply of a different kind.

*ii) Love is ‘ineluctably personal’[[177]](#footnote-177)*

By calling love ‘ineluctably personal’ Frankfurt is denying that it is based on any ‘describable’ features of the beloved – her properties, in other words. He is thus denying that appraisal features at all in love, other than perhaps by making the lover first notice the beloved. However, if love need not result from any prior value of the beloved, and the value of the beloved to the lover is purely the value that the lover has bestowed upon them, what we love seems to be arbitrary. Frankfurt says in ‘Getting it Right’:‘the object of love can be almost anything’[[178]](#footnote-178) and ‘love requires no reasons and can have anything as its cause.’[[179]](#footnote-179) He addresses the question of why we care about some things and not others in ‘The Importance of What We Care About’*.* However, his response is rather unsatisfactory as an explanation of romantic love:

‘It seems that it must be the fact that it is possible for him to care about the one and not the other, or to care about the one in a way which is more important to him than the way in which it is possible for him to care about the other. The person does not care about the object because its worthiness commands that he do so. On the other hand, the worthiness of the activity of caring commands that he choose an object which he will be able to care about.’[[180]](#footnote-180)

As Frankfurt describes love as a form of caring, I assume that this explanation covers why we love some people and not others. If so, what he says conflicts with how it is that we want to be loved: few would be satisfied with the answer to the question, ‘why do you love me?’ being ‘because it is possible for me to love you and I need to love something.’ Furthermore, his account implies that no things or people are objectively more worthy of love than others. This is implausible though; it is surely objectively true that my child is more worthy of my love than my alarm clock, but for Frankfurt, I could bestow as much value on the clock as I could on anything or anyone else and thus could love it more than my child without doing anything objectionable. However, this seems false: a parent who loved an alarm clock more than their child would seem to be in need of either chastisement or help; we would not just leave them to it. This shows that there must be at least some reasons for love and that these reasons must be at least partly based on the qualities of the beloved. As Kolodny explains, even if we cannot decide to love by weighing up reasons, it does not follow that there are no normative reasons for love. He compares love to belief: we cannot always just decide what to believe, but this does not entail that there are no normative reasons to believe X and not Y.[[181]](#footnote-181) As Susan Wolf notes, we have ‘an interest in living in the real world’; we don’t want to be deluded. Thus, we have an interest in loving only things that are worthy of love.[[182]](#footnote-182) Furthermore, as Annette Baier points out, if what we care about is as important to us as Frankfurt says it should be, and if caring involves a great deal of investment in the well-being of the beloved, it seems sensible to seriously consider what we should care about.[[183]](#footnote-183) Indeed, Frankfurt himself says this too,[[184]](#footnote-184) suggesting that one should consider whether loving something will improve one’s life.[[185]](#footnote-185) However, it seems impossible to do this if love is not justified by the properties of the beloved.[[186]](#footnote-186) If the reason for me loving X is merely that it is possible for me to love X and not Y, if I love X because of its nameability and not its describability, then how can I question whether loving X and not Y is the right thing?

Solomon agrees that the qualities of the beloved must have some role in explaining the reasons for love. He asks, ‘what is “the person,” apart from all of his or her properties? A naked soul? Can one in any erotic (as opposed to agapic) sense love an ontologically naked, property-less soul?’[[187]](#footnote-187) Such a soul is difficult to imagine, and probably even harder to love. If the love is not based on any properties of the beloved, then it seems that the lover could love the beloved without knowing anything about them, or indeed whilst knowing false information about them. Initially, we might think that this is true of parental love but not of friendship or romantic love. A mother might love a child she gave away at birth despite knowing nothing about him, or despite knowing false information about him. One might say that she loves him because of the ‘nameable’ bit of him, not the ‘describable’ bit. However, she does love him for something about him that *is* describable, and that is that he is her son. Thus, there is a puzzle here: parental love feels non-cognitive, but similarly it is not accidental that it’s our own children that we love. The relationship view, discussed in Chapter Four, will help us out of this puzzle by suggesting that, although there is a cognitive aspect to love, in that we love people because we value the relationship we share with them, love can appear to be non-cognitive because we do not always consciously evaluate the value of the relationship before deciding whether to love another.

These issues are particularly salient with regards to romantic love because we are generally very selective about whom we love romantically and this selectiveness gives romantic love part of its distinctive value. Being chosen from others makes romantic love boost the beloved’s self-esteem.[[188]](#footnote-188) As Derek Edyvane observes:

‘a large part of what we value about being the object of another’s love is that we take it to imply an informed and positive (or at least not negative), objective evaluation of our character, we think of love as being more than the arbitrary expression of a subjective whim. We want to know that there exist reasons that can render this person’s love for us intelligible to others.’[[189]](#footnote-189)

Though I don’t necessarily want others to love my beloved, I want them to understand why I love him and not another; I want them to agree that I have chosen the right person to love. In other words, I want my love to be justifiableto others*.*[[190]](#footnote-190)Furthermore, we want to be loved by someone who has chosen us and finds that choice intelligible. We don’t want to be loved simply because it was possible for the lover to love us. To be loved by someone who could love someone whatever their properties carries far less significance, and less value, than being loved by someone who loves us on the basis of our individual character. Whilst we accept that our parents would have loved any child they had had as much as they love us, we want our romantic partners to love us because of what we are like. As Foster highlights, a common objection to the view that people are loved on the basis of their properties is that someone with the same properties could be loved just as much. However, if love is not based on properties at all, and the value of the beloved to the lover is solely bestowed value, then Frankfurt’s beloved ‘may [too] feel that she could easily be replaced by someone else with very different qualities.’[[191]](#footnote-191) Nicholas Dixon takes this point further and argues that unless romantic love is based on the qualities of the beloved it is not love at all: ‘I do not love *you* if my love will continue no matter what you do and no matter how your qualities change, unless we are prepared to identify you with an immaterial Cartesian essence.’[[192]](#footnote-192) To be told that one will be loved romantically whatever one becomes, seems, as Troy Jollimore puts it, ‘as impersonal and alienating as “I would love anyone who had your name and social security number.”’[[193]](#footnote-193) Of course, sometimes love does persist despite major changes in the beloved, such as after the onset of Alzheimer’s disease or a serious stroke, and when it does, we tend to admire the strength of the lover’s love rather than dismiss it as unreal. However, these are special circumstances, and might be more accurately described as instances of what Delaney calls ‘loving commitment’[[194]](#footnote-194) than romantic love. This will be discussed in the following chapter.

*iii) ‘The lover identifies with his beloved’[[195]](#footnote-195)*

Frankfurt argues that to love something means to identify with it so that its well-being becomes tied up with your own. For example, Matilda feels happy when Jason gets a promotion at work, but sad when his boss belittles him in front of his colleagues. This is not because of the impact his happiness or sadness has on her, but simply because if he is unhappy then she is unhappy too because she loves him. This seems to be a reasonable expectation to have from love, particularly from romantic love, and in Chapter Five, I’ll explain how this sort of identification occurs through sharing an identity with one’s beloved, and why it is importantly valuable. However, identification seems to be in conflict with some of Frankfurt’s other ideas about love – that the lover does not need to know the beloved and that love is disinterested. Frankfurt does not seem to take seriously the fact that one is best able to identify with, and thus to love, someone with whom one is in a close relationship, and thus, once again, he fails to recognise the particular value of romantic love. Identification with the beloved requires intimate knowledge of a person that can be acquired only through spending a significant amount of time with them and through sharing intimate information with one another. In suggesting, as he does in *Duty and Love,* that, ‘I may love a woman, with no opportunity to affect her in any way; and she may have no inkling that I exist,’[[196]](#footnote-196) and in *Getting it Right* that, ‘the beloved may be entirely unaware of the love, and may be entirely unaffected by it,’[[197]](#footnote-197) Frankfurt implies that one can identify with another without sharing a relationship with them or even knowing them.

Against this claim, Bennett Helm suggests that love is ‘distinct from compassionate concern’ because in loving a particular person, ‘I must take an interest not just in his well-being but also in his identity itself, and the kind of interest I take in his identity must itself be deeply personal.’[[198]](#footnote-198) This is, in part, because the well-being of someone is tied up with her identity. To identify with a particular person requires that you love them ‘not merely as *a* person but as *this* person, as having this particular identity.’[[199]](#footnote-199) There is more to being a person than having one’s physiological needs met. Caring for someone as *a* person might mean giving them a certain amount of respect and dignity and making sure their basic needs are met. Caring for someone as *this* person entails caring for their identity, and it is this that makes love for a particular person different to care and concern for people in general. Returning to the example of giving money to a homeless person: when I give money to a homeless person I feel compassionate concern for the homeless; I care about their suffering and I want to try and ease it. I care for the homeless *as people*, but, without detailed knowledge of their lives, values and personalities, I cannot care for them as *individuals*,and thus I can only identify with them minimally. Suppose I make friends with a homeless person called Joan though: the more I get to know Joan, the better I can care for her as an individual, since I can appreciate and understand more and more the complexity of her needs and desires. It, therefore, becomes possible for me to love Joan, though it was not possible for me to love the homeless to whom I gave money before but did not get to know. It is identification that distinguishes the love of particular people from *agape*. Frankfurt seems, in his account of love, to try to unite *agape*, an unconditional love for humanity, with the love of particular people. However, though an omniscient god can have intimate, detailed knowledge of everyone in a way that allows them to care for all people as individuals, humans are far more limited. If we are very good we might be able to have compassionate concern for everyone, but we cannot love people whom we don’t know because we can only identify with a few people.

Frankfurt argues that love and caring involve taking on the beloved’s needs and desires *as one’s own*. In order to do this you need to share in their identity in some way; you need to feel that you have a stake in what happens to them. Romantic lovers, as I will argue in Chapter Five, are ideally located to do this. This is because they share their lives and identities in such a way that their needs and values become intertwined with one another’s. We are wary of the notion of love at first sight, because the ‘lovers’ have not had sufficient time to get to know each other. To illustrate what caring for someone’s identity entails, Helm tells a story about his wife playing in a bagpipe competition. He suggests that he values piping, not because it is part of his identity, but because he shares in her identity, and thus he cannot help but share in the value that piping has to her. This means that he feels very similar emotions that she feels during the competition: pride at winning and anxiety when things don’t go well. In fact, he knows her and cares for her so well that he feels anxious, ‘even when she does not recognize the impending threat to her identity,’ such as when he is aware that other people in the audience think she is no good. Thus, he states, ‘I commit myself to the place playing bagpipes (among other things) has in the kind of life worth *her* living, and so I commit myself to feeling a broad pattern of other emotions focused on her and subfocused on piping.’[[200]](#footnote-200) Of course, we do this in other relationships as well: a parent, for instance, might be heavily emotionally involved with their child’s performance at a school concert. However, it seems that there must be some kind of intimate relationship for such identification to take place, and romantic relationships are ideal for fostering identification.

Furthermore, as Foster points out, we need to know the beloved for as long as we love them and to continually renew our knowledge of them, because their interests will be continually evolving and changing. ‘We must come to know another person in order to be aware of her interests, but we should never let this knowledge become frozen so that we maintain a fixed concept of the other.’[[201]](#footnote-201) Thus, for Helm to care for the well-being of his bagpiping wife fully, he needs to converse with her; he needs to listen to her when she explains that she secretly wants to lose the bagpipe competition so will play deliberately badly because she really wants to learn to play the flute but she does not want her bagpiping friends to know this. We are wary when people continue to love someone with whom they once had a brief relationship because their love is based on a frozen image of their beloved and thus the object of their love really no longer exists. As Baier notes, the need for constant news about the welfare of whom we care about is a sign that we genuinely care about them.[[202]](#footnote-202)

Paradoxically, the desires to know another, to spend time with them and to have them share secrets with you, seem to be just the kind of self-interested concerns that conflict with Frankfurt’s conception of love. However, these desires are also closely aligned with the desire to care for the beloved as a particular individual. They are also essential for romantic love, which requires the lovers to share their lives in a significant way. Thus, it seems reasonable for Helm to be hurt if his wife does not tell him that she secretly wants to lose the bagpipe competition because by not telling him, she is denying him the opportunity to identify with her. Due to the reciprocal nature of romantic love, if she does not want him to care for her, he might think that she does not care for him. Conversely, if Helm loves his wife in the Frankfurtian way, he should not require that his wife tell him anything; he should love her regardless, and he has no obligation to share things with her. Thus, once again, Frankfurt appears to overlook some of distinct value of romantic love and one of the ways in which romantic lovers might be particularly well-positioned to care for each other authentically. One of the best ways to gain detailed knowledge of the other in a way that allows you to identify with them is through sharing a life together in a close, reciprocal relationship.

*iv) ‘Love is not a matter of choice’[[203]](#footnote-203)*

Frankfurt argues that love is outside of our direct control; we cannot love or stop loving someone merely by willing it to be so. This appeals to our intuition about love, but on further reflection, we seem to have more direct control over romantic love and friendship love than familial love. This is because both romantic partners and friends are chosen, and the love felt for our romantic beloveds and friends depends on us sharing a particular kind of relationship with them (I develop this point in Chapter Four). Thus, as it is possible to extract oneself from the relationships, we have some control over whether or not the love continues, though Frankfurt is right that in some cases we will not be able to bring ourselves to leave the relationship. We do have control over whether we enter into a romantic relationship or friendship with another though; this distinguishes romantic love from familial love.[[204]](#footnote-204) We wouldn’t even attempt to romantically love the majority of people, based on a rational decision that we wouldn’t get on with them, they would be bad for us in some way, or simply because we are not attracted to them.

Thus, romantic love does not just happen to us: it derives from a relationship which we choose to cultivate. The lover might feel that she cannot help loving her beloved, but whether she allows the love to develop in the first place is, to an extent, in her control. As Simon Keller notes, we can choose whether to ‘resist or embrace love’; in his words ‘when I find myself in love with someone, I can decide whether it would be better for me to send him flowers or to move to another city.’[[205]](#footnote-205) If I know they are not right for me, (perhaps they are violent or already have a partner) I can make the decision not to see that person anymore. At least during the early stages of love, many decisions are made regarding the romantic relationship, even if not entirely consciously. The lover decides whether to spend her Friday night with her friends or her new beloved, whether to ignore his annoying habits or to allow herself to be bothered by them, whether or not to open herself up to him and tell him her secrets. All of these decisions will affect whether the first flutters of love develop into something more long-lasting and substantial. Foster agrees:

‘unless one accepts that love at first sight (without knowledge of the beloved) is genuine love, then even in a love that develops quickly choices will be made. These choices will shape the relationship between two people. A history will develop that will affect one’s love for the other person.’[[206]](#footnote-206)

Perhaps Frankfurt would agree thus far; maybe he only believes that love is outside of our control once it has already taken hold of us. Nevertheless, the choices we have do not disappear once we are in love. The lover still has to make decisions that affect the relationship on which the love is based. For example, he can decide whether to move away for a promotion at work or stay with his beloved, whether to give up a drink habit he knows she might leave him for, whether to have sex with her friend who keeps flirting with him. Such decisions might appear to not be directly about love. The man who chooses to move away, to continue drinking, or to have sex with his partner’s friend might still love her dearly. However, as he knows, his decisions will affect whether and how the relationship, on which their love depends, will continue and thus they are also decisions about the love shared between them. It is not simply a case of ‘if he loves her he’ll sacrifice the promotion’. Instead, the man faces conflicting desires and a choice over which he is in control; love does not simply override all other reasons for action. Furthermore, he knows that he can decide to end the relationship, and that eventually he will stop loving his partner. Although it might be very hard to do this, if the reasons for ending the relationship, such as the promotion at work, outweigh his reasons for remaining in the relationship then he will be able to bring himself to leave; the limitation on his will is not total. It is not a necessity. As Michael Bratman points out, ‘wholeheartedness and the absence of any intention to change need not involve an incapacity. That I quite sensibly *would* not change does not mean that I *could* not change.’[[207]](#footnote-207) This is evidenced by the vast amount of people who do end relationships despite continuing to be in love. In his defence, Frankfurt could claim that they are not *really* in love, but this would be to beg the question. He could also say that people who end relationships with people whom they love just love other things, like their work, more than their romantic partners. However, even if this is true, they are still able to weigh up the things that they love and make decisions about them. In addition, it is debatable whether wholeheartedness, as Frankfurt construes it, is indeed always a good thing. As Wolf points out, ‘wholeheartedness in the face or the context of objective reasons for doubt, seems indistinguishable from zealotry, fanaticism, or, at the least, close-mindedness’.[[208]](#footnote-208) Wholeheartedly loving someone who continually abuses you is pitiable or irrational; it is not admirable.

Frankfurt might also say that the comparative readiness we have to leave romantic relationships, and their being more in our control than familial love is evidence of the lack of authenticity of romantic love. However, it might also be seen as evidence for the distinct value of romantic love. The reason why romantic love is more in our control than parental love is because romantic love depends, at least in part, on a chosen relationship, the workings of which can be voluntarily altered by them. One cannot totally withdraw from a parent-child relationship; even if a child is given away at birth, her birth mother will always be her birth mother. On the other hand, a romantic relationship requires voluntary commitment to the relationship by both partners. If one person no longer wants to be in the romantic relationship then neither person can refer to herself as the other’s partner. As it is possible to end the romantic relationship, romantic love is, to an extent, conditional on the success of the relationship. If one or both lovers stop working at the relationship, don’t spend much time together and stop being intimate with one another, then the relationship, and the love, will fall apart. Of course, we should work at our familial relationships as well, but familial love is far more likely to be unconditional, or nearly unconditional, than romantic love. This is partly because familial love is less voluntary than romantic love; families are bound to each other more tightly. As they are necessarily bonded to one another in such a way they may feel that their ‘love is not a matter of choice’. Romantic lovers are not bound to each other and know that either might stop loving the other at any point – even if they are married and very committed to one another. Nevertheless, this does not make romantic love less valuable than familial love. Having some control over whom you love romantically gives you greater control over your life, making you more likely to love someone who makes you happy. In addition, being loved by someone who could choose *not* to be in a relationship with you can be a greater boost to your self-esteem than being loved involuntarily by a family member. It also makes you more likely to treat them well. A point I will develop in further chapters is that part of the value of romantic love comes from having someone who has chosen to take on obligations towards you and to share their life with you.

**5) Conclusion**

Following this examination of Frankfurt’s theory of love, I am in agreement with Foster in his rejection of Frankfurt’s claim that, ‘there is really one kind of love which comes in degrees of purity.’[[209]](#footnote-209) Frankfurt tries to take *agape* and reformulate it so that it can also account for love of particular people. Whilst he succeeds, to some extent, in describing parental love, he fails to accurately describe romantic love and friendship, and, moreover, overlooks what is distinctly valuable about them. Although it was not his intention to describe romantic love, by failing to include such features as reciprocity and shared identity in his account of love, Frankfurt leaves no room for a kind of love that is very important and valuable to many people. In addition, though they are not always easy to articulate, we do think that there are justifiable reasons to love some people and not others. There is a place for appraisal in romantic love and friendship.

The value of this chapter to the thesis as a whole is to show that there is a distinct genre of love that can be called ‘romantic love’ that is an important source of value. I hope to have demonstrated that there are reasons for romantic love and that these are closely aligned to the reasons for wanting to be in a romantic relationship with a particular person. In the next chapter I will develop this idea, considering whether people’s properties provide us with the reasons for loving them.

**Chapter Three: Do we love people because of their properties?**

**1) Introduction**

This thesis seeks to understand whether there is value in monogamy. As explained in the introduction, in order to answer this question, we need first to understand what it means to love someone romantically and what value there is to this kind of love. In the previous chapter I argued that Frankfurt’s account of love overlooks the distinct value of romantic love, some of which derives from its selectivity and conditionality. In this chapter, I consider the claim that love is a rational response to the qualities of the beloved. This view is in some ways the direct opposite of Frankfurt’s view. I call the view that love is a positive evaluative response to certain characteristics of a person the ‘quality view’ or the ‘properties view’. I will argue that, though the properties of the beloved will get us some way towards understanding why we love them, taken on its own, this view is unable to account for the reasons for and the phenomenology of romantic love.

The structure of this chapter will be as follows: I will first outline the quality view and explain how it contrasts with Frankfurt’s account of love. I will then discuss seven problems the quality view faces as a theory of love, before considering two more nuanced versions of the view, which also take the romantic relationship into account – Neil Delaney’s and Simon Keller’s. Both of these views are an improvement on the simple quality view because they also acknowledge the significance of the romantic relationship. However, both want to maintain that love is grounded on the properties of the beloved and so their accounts still face some of the objections to the simple quality view. Indeed, most of the most persuasive comments they make about romantic love are about its connection to a particular kind of relationship rather than to the qualities of the beloved. I will conclude that we need more careful analysis of the romantic relationship to understand romantic love and that a person’s qualities by themselves do not justify love even if they might cause us to be initially attracted to them.

**2) The quality view**

If we are seeking to explain what it is about Matilda that makes Jason love her and not others, an obvious answer is that it is Matilda’s qualities[[210]](#footnote-210) as these are what set her apart from others. This account of love is quite simple: a quality theorist would say, ‘Jason loves Matilda because she is kind to animals, funny, intelligent and easy-going.’ These qualities of Matilda are sufficient to explain why he loves her (though they may not be necessary) and, therefore, they justify Jason’s love for her. Put simply, we value certain qualities and we love the people who possess them. If correct, this makes it perfectly appropriate to ask someone why they love their beloved and makes their response straightforward; they need simply to reply with a list of properties that the beloved has and to say that these are properties they value. In other words, a positive appraisal of the beloved is a necessary and sufficient reason for loving them. This would place love in the same category as other quality-based evaluative responses to people, such as 'like', 'admire', 'dislike' and ‘hate'. It would also explain why our self-esteem can, and should, be boosted by being loved romantically; if love is based on a positive favouring of one's characteristics then it is evidence that the beloved has characteristics which deserve favour.

**3) The quality view and Frankfurt**

The quality view is, to a degree, in direct opposition to Frankfurt’s view. If we return to the notions of appraisal and bestowal we can see how clear the contrast is. For the quality theorist, the value of the beloved resides in her; the lover appraises this value positively and loves her for it. By contrast, for Frankfurt, the beloved’s value resides in the lover’s love, and is bestowed onto the beloved through that love. For Frankfurt, the qualities of the beloved might cause the lover to love her, but they do not justify his love for her. Similarly, Matilda being in the pub where Jason worked on that balmy evening in June might have been part of the causal chain that led Matilda and Jason to fall in love, but it does not justify their love. By contrast, for the quality theorist, the properties of the beloved that make love a fitting response both cause and justify the lover’s love for him. She would respond to the question about why she loved her beloved with a list of his qualities. Thus, for the quality theorist, the appraisals of the lover are very important in explaining her love; for Frankfurt, it is the basic attitude that is central. For Frankfurt, love is a source of reasons rather than a consequence of reasons. As the quality theorist accepts appraisal as a feature of love, she is able to respond to two objections that were raised in the previous chapter against Frankfurt’s account of love when applied to romantic love. I will now explain how she can do this.

**3.1) Disinterested concern**

Frankfurt argues that romantic love is not an authentic example of love because it does not consist purely of disinterested concern. This is partly because romantic love aims at reciprocity and a reciprocal relationship will benefit the lover by serving her interests as well as the beloved’s. Romantic love, as Frankfurt observes, includes a number of self-interested desires, such as the desire for companionship and to have sex with one’s beloved. Parental love does not depend on reciprocity and is more disinterested; thus it is, for Frankfurt, the purest kind of love. However, I argued in the previous chapter that, contraFrankfurt, desiring reciprocity does not make love inauthentic; it just makes it a different kind of love. Furthermore, Frankfurt’s account implies that being loved should not boost our self-esteem since love is not based on a positive evaluation of our character. This does not fit with our experience of romantic love though. We usually assume that at least part of the reason for loving a person is because of their qualities and that being loved romantically should give us reason to feel good about ourselves. Indeed, romantic love is distinctly valuable to us, in part, because it involves self-interest. While parents often delight in their children’s properties, they would usually love them were they to value none of their qualities. Conversely, romantic love tends to depend on at least some positive valuing of the beloved’s qualities.

The quality theorist accepts self-interest as a feature of romantic love without this entailing that it is less authentic than other kinds of love. If the reason for loving someone romantically is that they possess qualities which the lover values and takes pleasure in, then the value of romantic love lies in the beloved’s possession of qualities which the lover finds lovable. However, we do not just want to love romantically in order to receive benefits; we also want to provide benefits to the beloved. The reciprocity of romantic love prevents it from being problematically self-interested: although we want to be loved for the way we are, we want to love in this way too, and we want to be loved, at least in part, because of what we give to our beloveds.

**3.2) Love as ‘ineluctably personal’**

A further problem I identified with Frankfurt’s account when applied to romantic love is that, if appraisal does not feature at all in the reasons for romantic love, then why we love one person rather than another appears to be arbitrary. This has the uncomfortable consequence that the reason I love my partner and not my alarm clock is not because my partner is more worthy of my love. It is rather because I need to love something and it is possible for me to love my partner and not my alarm clock.[[211]](#footnote-211) This seems wrong: although we have difficulty explaining why we love our beloveds, our starting point is usually their qualities, and we believe that we have chosen our beloveds because of the way they are. People have ‘types’ and tend to seek out people to love on the basis of their qualities. Dating websites are a testament to this: people seek out potential partners based on their responses to questions about their properties. Indeed, even the least discerning person might care, for example, about the age and gender of the person with whom they fall in love. Furthermore, when we are the recipient of romantic love we usually assume that we merit the love; that we are loved *because* of the way we are. We believe that we have been chosen as someone who could be loved by the lover out of a range of people whom they could not love. This is the reason why being loved tends to boost our self-esteem. If we were not loved at all for our qualities, then we would have been chosen because of some arbitrary fact about us, such as that we were in the right place at the right time. Therefore, anyone would have done just as well.

The quality view offers a clear antidote to the worry that love is arbitrary. For the quality theorist, love is a rational, rather than an arbitrary, response to a person. It is a response to the describable features of them, not to their bare individuality. The beloved *does* merit her lover’s love through having qualities that make her loveable. It is obvious on this view why I love my partner and not my alarm clock: he is clever, funny and kind; my alarm clock only rudely wakes me up every morning.

**4) Problems with the quality view**

Despite having the aforementioned strengths over Frankfurt’s arationalist view of love, there are several objections that can be made against the quality view. In this section I will discuss seven significant problems with the account; I will look at possible ways of responding to these objections later on.

**4.1) How can the quality theorist distinguish love from admiration or liking?**

The reason for admiring or liking someone is that one values and delights in their qualities. If the reason for loving a person is the same as this then how are the responses to a person to be differentiated? It is often the case that someone has all of the characteristics that we like and admire and yet we do not love them. This suggests that love is something more than just the favouring of the positive qualities of a person. Love, particularly romantic love, is not just higher up on the ‘liking scale’, but seems to be a different *kind* of response to a person. Best friends might like and value all of each other’s characteristics, but not love each other romantically or desire to love each other. Although we very often use the word ‘love’ to mean ‘really like’, as in when we say ‘I love tomatoes’, to love a person implies a special concern for them that does not follow from merely liking them. The lover cares non-instrumentally for the beloved and is moved to act on that care. Furthermore, she wants to contribute to the wellbeing of the beloved. Liking or admiring someone does not entail caring for their good in this way; it does not follow from the fact that you admire a certain politician that you want to be the person to comfort her when she is upset. In addition, romantic love also includes various desires, such as the desire to be with the beloved, to have sexual intimacy with them and to have them return your love. Such desires are not necessary features of admiration or even of liking someone.

The quality theorist is unable to account for the difference between love and admiration or liking, other than to say it is one of degree: the person we love is just the one that we like or admire the most, the one with the most qualities that we favour. If they do not say this then they will have to concede that there is more to love than the valuing of someone’s qualities. However, this explanation does not work since usually the person we love romantically is not the person we like or admire the most out of our friends and often we could not imagine ourselves romantically loving our best friend.

Frankfurt can, of course, distinguish love from liking or admiration very easily. For him, love is a kind of caring, not a kind of valuing. Therefore, it is not necessary to like or admire that which you love and love is a wholly distinct kind of response to a person.[[212]](#footnote-212) He rejects appraisal as a necessary feature of love because, ‘the fact that a person recognizes that an object is valuable or that it is good does not imply that he cares about it.’[[213]](#footnote-213) However, Frankfurt then has the trouble of accounting for love between friends and romantic lovers which does seem to depend, quite significantly, on valuing each other’s qualities. Liking or admiring someone might then be a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for romantic love and friendship.[[214]](#footnote-214)

**4.2) Why should the quality theorist care non-instrumentally for the well-being of the beloved?**

Closely related to problem 4.1 is that the quality theorist does not seem to have any reason to show non-instrumental concern for her beloved. She could say that appreciating qualities in some instances just generates certain motivations, such as non-instrumental care for the bearer’s well-being, but this is unsatisfactory. As explained in 4.1, sometimes our appreciation of certain qualities results in admiration rather than love and thus we would need to explain why sometimes appreciating qualities leads to love but at other times it does not. It is not enough to say that the lover favours the beloved’s qualities; we also need to consider the way in which she favours them and why that leads to non-instrumental care. If Matilda shares many of the same qualities as Maria, this does not mean that Jason will care for Maria in the way that he cares for Matilda. We might also remember that appreciating someone’s qualities can even lead to almost the opposite of non-instrumental care for them. Sue might, for example, appreciate that Pete is very intelligent and kind but feel envious of him and resentful that he seems to find life so easy. She might even wish that some tragedy befell him to make him less intelligent and kind.

The quality theorist might say that the lover has reason to care for her beloved so that she will continue to provide the lover with the qualities that he values and enjoys, but this would not be non-instrumental care as it would be solely motivated by self-interest. For example, Sarah who loves her wife, Janice, on account of her beauty, might devote a lot of money to caring for her health and appearance through buying her a gym membership and designer clothes and make-up. Whilst, on the face of it, Sarah appears to be acting lovingly, really she is just serving her own self-interest by helping Janice to continue to have the qualities which Sarah enjoys *simply because she enjoys them*. Her care for Janice is instrumental to providing her with an attractive wife and thus it does not count as love.

Another move the quality theorist could make could be to propose that a person’s qualities are the reasons for falling in love with him but that the attitudes involved in love are not related to the qualities of the beloved. However, we would still be left with the question of why the lover responds to the beloved with *love* rather than liking or admiration. In addition, if the qualities of the beloved are only the reasons for the lover falling in love with her then we would need another explanation for why the lover continues loving the beloved. Therefore, the quality theorist seems to need to admit that there must be something more to love than favouring the beloved’s qualities if she is to account for the non-instrumental care that is a significant part of love.

**4.3) Love for ‘whole people’ and not for properties**

Frankfurt is very clear that it is the *person,* by virtue of her nameability, that is loved, not her features. She is loved purely for her bare individuality, not for her characteristics. However, for the quality theorist, the distinction between a person and her qualities is blurred. This is apparent in Plato’s version of the quality view. In the *Symposium,* through the character of Diotima, Plato says that love ‘may be described generally as the love of the everlasting possession of the good.’[[215]](#footnote-215) All love aims at the same thing: the possession of ‘true beauty.’ Therefore, love can be justified or unjustified depending on how beautiful or good the beloved is. There is a hierarchy of love based on the beauty or goodness of the object in question.[[216]](#footnote-216) Gregory Vlastos argues that Plato’s idea of love is fundamentally flawed because, for Plato, love ‘is not directed at an individual in the proper sense of the word – to the integral and irreplaceable existent that bears that person’s name – but to a complex of qualities, answering to the lover’s sense of beauty, which he locates truly or falsely in that person.’[[217]](#footnote-217) He suggests that to love someone for their qualities is to love them as an objectification of those qualities rather than to love them as a subject, a ‘thinking, feeling, wishing, hoping, fearing being.’[[218]](#footnote-218) Vlastos’s worry is that people are more than collections of properties and so to love them for their qualities is not to love them as persons. This is due to the intuition we have that people are more than the sum of their parts. The beloved might worry that if she is not loved for her whole person, but only for her qualities, then is it really *she* that is loved?[[219]](#footnote-219)

The consequences of loving someone for their qualities and not for their whole person might thus be quite problematic. One concern is that being a mere collection of qualities, the beloved is replaceable. Anyone with the same or better qualities would do just as well. However, the beloved’s apparent irreplaceability is one of the reasons for the intensity and passion of romantic love and for the devastation often felt over its loss. Another possible consequence of loving someone for her qualities is that *she* is not really loved at all, but only her particular ways of being and doing things. Instead of saying ‘I love you’, the lover should say ‘I love your good looks, sense of humour and way of cooking chicken’. This is not how we want to be loved though, or what we feel we are doing when we love someone. Although we might initially seek out people with certain qualities, once we are in love, we feel ourselves to love the beloved as an evolving, non-fungible subject.

**4.4) If love is for qualities then why does it resist opportunities to trade-up and persist despite changes in the beloved?**

Another problem faced by the quality theorist is that the view struggles to explain why love is tenacious. This is related to the above problem; if we do not love people as ‘whole people’ who will change with time, but rather we love them only on the basis of their qualities, then why do we not 'trade-up', to use Robert Nozick's expression,[[220]](#footnote-220) when we find someone with better qualities? Is there any reason, on the quality view, for Jason not to swap Matilda for her friend Maria who is even kinder to animals, funnier, more intelligent, more easy-going, and wants to be his girlfriend? Indeed, it would be irrational not to do so. Though trading-up does, of course, sometimes happen, we tend to think that the trader did not really love the traded person in the first place[[221]](#footnote-221) or that they had fallen out of love. This is because seeking to trade-up is inconsistent with love, as it implies that the beloved is cared about only instrumentally. Indeed, as Jollimore notes, merely comparing one’s beloved with others is best avoided[[222]](#footnote-222) and the lover who is constantly wondering whether her beloved is the best she can get does not seem to genuinely be in love.[[223]](#footnote-223) If your partner was always rationally deliberating whether to stay with you or find someone else, in the way that they deliberated over whether to buy a new car or keep their old one, you would rightly feel that their love for you was deficient, at best.

In addition, love does not seem to come and go with the changing moods of our partners. If Matilda loves Jason for his carefree approach to life, that does not mean she is rationally committed to not loving him on a day when he is particularly worried about something trivial. Such fickle love would not seem to be love at all. Moreover, love often persists despite quite significant changes in the beloved. Long-term lovers watch each other lose their looks, become parents, gain success, lose their jobs, suffer bouts of depression, fall ill and so on. Although such changes can sometimes cause the love to dwindle away, often love remains through all these drastic changes and sometimes even when the beloved loses many or all of the qualities for which the lover was first attracted to her. Indeed, the most tenacious love is often considered to be the ideal kind of love, and we admire lovers who stick with partners through hard times.

**4.5) Why love only one, or only a few, people romantically?**

The focus of this thesis is monogamy, so it is appropriate to point out that the quality view has serious implications for our approach to monogamy. Though not exclusively so, romantic love tends, in Western society at least, to be monogamous. There are exceptions, of course, but even polyamorous people usually love only a few people at a time. However, if what we really value are the qualities, rather than the person who possesses them, then why not love everyone who has those qualities? We have no trouble in liking or admiring everyone who has all and only the qualities that we like or admire, but we do not love everyone who has all and only the qualities that we love. Indeed, we can like or admire someone whom we have never met if we know that they have qualities that we like or admire; and thus it is possible to like or admire a vast number of people. The same is not true for love. However, if the quality view could adequately account for love, it would provide us with a very strong reason to believe that love is not monogamous. If love is grounded on qualities rather than people, then it could be very promiscuous indeed.

**4.6) How can the quality theorist explain different modes of love?**

Niko Kolodny observes that for the quality theorist there is a problem of how to explain different ‘modes’ of love. As he puts it, ‘Heather’s mother and Heather’s teenage friend may both love her, but they love her, or at least they ought to love her, in different ways. [...] How is the quality theorist to explain this?’ Kolodny suggests that the quality theorist might argue that Heather’s mother and her friend love her in different ways because they are acquainted with different qualities of Heather. However, he then points out that we would still assume that they loved her in different ways, even if Heather’s mother and her friend knew of and valued all the same qualities of Heather.[[224]](#footnote-224) Thus, even if the quality theorist can explain why the lover should carefor her beloved, she still needs to explain why she ought to care for her in a particular way. The qualities alone cannot account for why different relations of Heather will feel a different kind of love for her and express their love differently towards her.

Related to this point is that the quality view is entirely wrong as an account of familial love. We do not love our parents, siblings or children because of their good looks or sparkling personalities, and to do so would be inappropriate. This might not be a problem if the quality theorist is trying to explain only romantic love and friendship. However, the attitudes involved in romantic love, friendship and familial love bear enough similarities to assume that there may be a common thread running between them.

**4.7) The quality theorist cannot account for the significance of the relationship to the lovers**

Romantic lovers often care very much about their relationship, as well as each other, and might feel themselves to ‘love the relationship’. They are often sentimental about anniversaries and other things, such as songs and places, which mean something to them, collectively. For example, though Jason may not like a particular song for its own sake, it might be very meaningful to him if it was playing in the restaurant when Matilda and he went for their first date. Lovers often create a narrative of their relationship, and might retell each other stories pertinent to their development as a couple. Furthermore, when people break up they often mourn the loss of their relationship as well as the loss of their partner. The quality theorist has difficulty explaining the phenomenon of ‘loving the relationship’ since, for them, the beloved is loved for their non-relational properties and thus the relationship does not play a role in justifying the love.

**5) What have we learned so far?**

At this point, it seems that we are left with many problems and little in the way of solutions with regards to why we love people romantically. I, therefore, want to pause to briefly consider what we have learned from the discussion of the arationalist and the rationalist positions so far in order to help us go forward and find an account of love that works.

1. There is a rational element to romantic love as we select our romantic partners and romantic love is, to an extent, conditional. It does not always persist despite changes in the beloved.
2. On the other hand, romantic love is tenacious and often endures quite significant changes in the lovers. It might even remain despite the better judgment of the lover, such as is sometimes the case with people in abusive relationships. Further, sometimes we don’t know for what reason we selected our romantic partner and might feel that the decision was out of our control. There is, therefore, also an arational element to romantic love, or at least to its phenomenology.
3. Romantic love is a different kind of response from liking or admiring someone. However, romantic lovers do tend to like each other and disliking all of one’s beloved’s properties seems inconsistent with loving them. A relatively positive appraisal of one’s beloved seems to be a necessary, though not sufficient, condition of loving them.
4. Love involves a form of caring attitude in which one identifies with the beloved. Romantic love typically involves more identification than friendship love or familial love between adults. Because of this, romantic love requires intimate, detailed knowledge of the beloved.
5. A relationship is a necessary condition of romantic love.

**6) Simon Keller’s and Neil Delaney’s versions of the quality view**

Simon Keller and Neil Delaney both defend the view that romantic love is grounded in the qualities of the beloved, but they try to be more specific about which qualities these are, and about what it means to love someone, in order to avoid some of the objections made above. In what follows I will briefly explain both of their views, and consider whether they have overcome the main objections, as described above, to the quality view.

**6.1) Simon Keller: ‘How do I love thee? Let me count the properties’**

**6.1.1) The kinds of qualities for which we should be loved**

Coming from the perspective of the ideal romantic relationship, Keller initially makes two points about romantic love: that it should be conditional, and that it should make us feel good about ourselves.[[225]](#footnote-225) He argues that a theory of love must accommodate these facts. He characterises romantic love in terms of desires rather than emotions, and notes the importance of having a relationship with the beloved.[[226]](#footnote-226) For Keller, ‘part of what it is to love someone romantically is to desire to share with him a loving relationship that is intimate, mutual, exclusive, and possibly sexual.’[[227]](#footnote-227) He writes that, although love is justified by the beloved’s properties, the lover does not love the properties; she loves the beloved.[[228]](#footnote-228) However, not all properties are appropriate reasons for love; Keller makes the following clarifications about which qualities ground love:

1. The beloved should not be truly loved for a quality that she has necessarily, such as the property ‘of being her’. This is in stark disagreement with Frankfurt who believes that the only ‘property’ for which a person can be loved is her ‘nameability’, a property which she could not have not had.
2. The beloved should not to be loved for things she did in the ‘too distant past’, such as being the person who used to send you flowers.
3. She should not be loved for extrinsic properties, such as ‘being the person of whom your mother approves.’
4. The lover should love the beloved for properties that ‘she takes to be intrinsically or objectively attractive, meaning that she doesn’t appreciate these properties just because they are attached to her beloved.’[[229]](#footnote-229) This is, again, in clear opposition to Frankfurt’s view that love is not a response to positively appraised characteristics, but bestows value on properties just because they are attached to the beloved.

Moreover, Keller suggests that, underlying the guidelines for the kinds of properties for which we should be loved, is the thought that they ought to make us feel good about ourselves and that, among those that are of particular significance to romantic love, are those that make us good romantic partners. An example of such a quality is knowing ‘how to treat one’s beloved when he is in a bad mood.’ Of course, the qualities that make a person a good romantic partner will depend on the needs and desires of the particular lover and are thus context-dependent.[[230]](#footnote-230) Being overly affectionate might be the way to bring one person out of a bad mood but irritate another. Thus, some of the qualities for which we can be loved are relational rather than intrinsic: they depend on the interactions and relationship between the lovers. This does not conflict with Keller’s point – that the beloved must be loved for qualities that the lover finds intrinsically attractive – because the lover will find some relational properties, such as ‘being affectionate to me when I’m in a bad mood,’ intrinsically attractive.

**6.1.2) Love and change**

Keller addresses the question of why love persists despite changes in the qualities of the lovers. He points out that being a romantic partner can itself help us to develop certain virtues, such as the art of compromise, thinking of others before acting and being able to argue constructively.[[231]](#footnote-231) If we are loved for those properties that make us good romantic partners, then developing these through being in a romantic relationship is likely to make both partners more loveable to each other. The personal growth that being a romantic partner can help to foster also tells us something about why romantic love is valuable.

Keller gives two reasons for not ‘trading up’ when we meet someone with better qualities than our partner. The first is that the romantic relationship requires ‘throwing your lot in with someone’ and a willingness to disarm oneself. Keller suggests that it is not possible to make yourself emotionally vulnerable to someone whilst simultaneously seeking to trade-up. You need to know that the relationship is relatively long-term and that this is someone with whom you feel comfortable. Therefore, if we want to enjoy the benefits of a romantic relationship we cannot be seeking to trade-up. Secondly, Keller argues that ‘in an ideal romantic relationship, the lovers will know that there is no better partner to be found.’ This is because romantic partners change together, and that this will entail that they come to value each other’s properties or change their properties to fit what the other values. For example, through being together, Matilda and Jason’s political views and interests might converge and they might take up salsa dancing together, finding in it a shared passion. Also, some of the properties you value in your partner will be a product of your shared history, such as ‘knowing when you are joking’.[[232]](#footnote-232) Thus, Keller implies that wanting to trade-up implies that the relationship is deficient.

**6.2) Problems with Keller’s account**

Although Keller’s account is an improvement on the simple quality view there are some problems with his ideas about what should motivate romantic love. Firstly, I object to the idea that one should not be loved for properties ‘just because they are attached to her’. Keller makes this a condition because, ‘the properties for which we are loved should be of such a nature as to give us a reason to feel good about ourselves,’[[233]](#footnote-233) and if we are loved for properties just because they are ours, the love will not make us feel good about ourselves. However, it is a notable feature of romantic love – and indeed friendship and familial love too – that the lover might come to value qualities of the beloved that she does not take to be ‘objectively attractive.’ For example, Matilda might value the softness of Jason’s earlobes, or a particular catchphrase he has, or even something she finds objectively unattractive, such as the way he snores. She values these qualities *because they are his*, not because she values them in everyone; indeed, she would not value those qualities in anyone else. Valuing these properties depends on her loving him: if she and Jason fall out of love, she might stop valuing these qualities in him too; perhaps even finding his catchphrases annoying and the way he snores repulsive. Furthermore, being valued for qualities that are not objectively or commonly found attractive might actually make a person feel very good about himself by showing him that he is loved in his entirety.

In addition, Keller seems to intellectualise romantic love too much, making it seem like the consequence of a rational deliberative thought process. Indeed, he acknowledges this objection, and bites the bullet by arguing that, ‘we can, to some extent, decide whether or not to love someone; I think that romantic love, to some extent, deserves to be intellectualized [...] we can decide whether it should be embraced or resisted.’[[234]](#footnote-234) This is certainly true in the early stages of a relationship, and, as I argued in the previous chapter, we do have some control over whom we love. We can decide to leave the country for a job, for example, knowing that this will have disastrous effects for the relationship and the love felt. Nonetheless, romantic love often feels out of our control and though we might want to resist it we may find that we cannot.

Finally, Keller’s account still faces some of the objections made against the quality view in Section 4 of this chapter. He does not say enough about why the lover *loves* the beloved, rather than merely likes her or admires her. He observes that the lover wants to share an intimate relationship with the beloved, but if this is the distinguishing factor then it may be the relationship that grounds the love, not the qualities. In addition, his reasons for why lovers do not trade-up are not entirely convincing – often lovers do not change together, yet still remain together. Further, one of his reasons for them not trading up is that this is because a willingness to trade-up would damage the current relationship which requires ‘throwing their lot in’ with each other. This seems reasonable, but implies, again, that it is the relationship keeping them together, not a positive valuation of each other’s qualities. His account also does not address the issue of why we love people in different modes. Finally, Keller asserts that an ideal romantic relationship holds between two-people, but does not argue for this point. Therefore, his account does not provide a sufficiently persuasive model of romantic love.

**6.3) Neil Delaney: ‘Romantic Love and Loving Commitment’**

Like Keller, Delaney’s starting point for developing a model of romantic love is not with what it *is,* but rather what the ideal of it is, or what people want from it.[[235]](#footnote-235) He defends a version of the quality view, on the grounds that we want to be loved for certain properties, but suggests that not all kinds of qualities are appropriate candidates for reasons of love. Further, this is not all we want from romantic love; we also want to form a ‘we’with our romantic partner,[[236]](#footnote-236) and to be committed to them. Thus, he writes: ‘people want to form a distinctive sort of *we* with another person, to be *loved for properties* of certain kinds, and to have this love generate and sustain a *commitment* to them of a certain type.’[[237]](#footnote-237) Being loved for properties is thus an essential, though not a sufficient feature of ideal romantic love. The lover must also want to form a ‘we’ with the beloved and be committed to her.

Delaney argues that the beloved wants to be loved for qualities that are ‘central to his self-conception’. When the beloved asks himself, ‘“what am I about?”’ the qualities he decides upon will be those for which he wants to be loved.’ To be loved for the right reasons just means to be loved for the right properties.[[238]](#footnote-238) Thus, if Jason considers his open-mindedness and laid back approach to his career to be central to his self-conception, but Matilda loves him for his sporting ability and good looks, then he will feel that she loves him for the wrong reasons. The qualities about him which she values are those that he considers to be peripheral to his self-conception. Furthermore, being loved for the right reasons helps us to strengthen our self-conceptions by allowing us to ‘to maintain our belief that we have the properties we so highly value about ourselves.’ This is one of the functions of romantic love.[[239]](#footnote-239) Though Delaney is not committed to saying that love for the wrong reasons is not really love at all, he implies that it would be deficient in some way because it would not be focussed on those properties that are at the ‘core of the identity’ of the beloved.[[240]](#footnote-240)

In addition, Delaney thinks it is very important to distinguish between love for properties and love for people. Thus, he points out that wanting to be loved for one’s qualities means, ‘A wants such properties to be the ground of the attitude B has adopted, not the object.’[[241]](#footnote-241) Although A’s properties are the reason for B’s love, they are not the focus of his love; A is the focus of his love. To compare: my reasons for liking ice-cream are its creaminess and sweetness. These features are the grounds of my liking ice-cream, and indeed, I would not like it were it not both sweet and creamy. Nonetheless, the object of my liking is the ice-cream, not its features.

The final points I wish to draw from Delaney’s paper are his reasons for why the beloved is irreplaceable and why we do not ‘trade-up’ or stop loving our beloved when her properties change. The first is that some of the properties for which we are loved might be ‘historical-relational properties.’ These are properties such as ‘the property of having been her dance partner at the USO social in ’44.’ Therefore, they are non-duplicable. Delaney suggests that such properties are central to some people’s self-conceptions and are therefore often appropriate reasons for love. Though having been one’s dance partner at a social, taken on its own, is not a ground for love, it is ‘the accumulation of these historical-relational properties that largely accounts for love’s strongly individuative character.’[[242]](#footnote-242) Thus, it is these kinds of properties that make love focus on one person, and that make that one person irreplaceable to the lover. However, he suggests that the degree to which you want to be loved for relational properties over intrinsic properties will depend on the taste of the individual.[[243]](#footnote-243)

Secondly, Delaney suggests that ideal love should be ‘plastic’ so that the lover’s feeling ‘tracks’ the important changes to the beloved’s self-conception.[[244]](#footnote-244) Suppose Jason loves Matilda’s kindness to animals, a quality she considers central to her self-conception. As she gets older she gradually decides that people are more important than animals and caring for animals means she has less time to care for people. She thus resolves to spend more of her time caring for the homeless and less of her time thinking about animals. Ideally, Jason’s reasons for loving her will track this change and he will come to love her for the quality of caring for the homeless. However, there are limitations on the extent to which his love should track changes in her properties. Delaney points out that we should not be expected to love our beloved for properties which threaten the *we*, such as their propensity to shy away from intimacy; and so the desire for plasticity must be balanced with the demand of reciprocity. Thus, we should avoid changing so significantly that it makes our relationship impossible. For example, it is reasonable for a lover to wish that his beloved ‘not allow a summer in Paris to change her outlook so profoundly as to make her view him as tiresomely unsophisticated and perhaps unworthy of her previous attentions.’ What we ultimately want through love’s plasticity and reciprocity is to preserve the ‘psychological intimacy that characterizes a healthy romantic *we’.*[[245]](#footnote-245)The idea of the *we* is thus central to Delaney’s account, and his notion of ‘loving commitment’ explains why we remain in romantic relationships despite significant changes in each other. I discuss these two features in more detail below.

**6.4) What we can learn from Delaney’s account?**

**6.4.1) Historical-relational features**

If someone is loved, at least in part, for historical-relational features, then they are irreplaceable to the lover. No-one else held your hand that night in the cinema when you first kissed; no-one else helped you through the death of your mother; no-one else spent that rainy weekend in a tent with you playing scrabble. Thus, if these are the sorts of qualities for which one is loved, then we can explain how Matilda can love Jason for his qualities but not dump him as soon as he loses his looks or carefree disposition or seek to trade-up with someone else. Though Matilda might meet someone with better intrinsic properties than Jason, no-one will share his particular set of historical-relational features. I think Delaney is right that these kinds of properties play an important role in explaining our romantic love. However, he underestimates their significance; I will discuss this point below in the first objection I make to Delaney’s account.

**6.4.2) Loving commitment**

Delaney observes that there is an inconsistency between people’s desires with regard to romantic love.[[246]](#footnote-246) He suggests that we have conflicting needs for stability in love and for the lover to be discerning in whom they love. The lover’s love means less to the beloved if it is not based at all on their qualities, because then it seems like the lover could love anyone else just as much. Thus, if the lover commits to love her beloved ‘no matter what’, the beloved will feel less valued than if the lover continually chooses to be with her beloved. At the same time though, the beloved wants to know that she will still be loved if she loses some or even all the properties for which the lover loves her, and that the lover will not ‘trade-up’ for someone with better qualities. Due to this conflict of desires, Delaney suggests that it is not unconditional love we want, but loving commitment. This entails ‘a sincere willingness to attend to the other’s interests and needs, and reflects a choice to sustain the relationship at its customary degree of intimacy, a choice that is always open to renewal and always freely renewed.’[[247]](#footnote-247) Loving commitment differs from other kinds of contracts in that the lover is not bound to love the beloved in all circumstances but rather she continually and freely commits to trying to maintain or augment the care and concern felt towards him.

I think Delaney is right that we want inconsistent things from love; this is to what I referred in the previous chapter as ‘the paradox of love’. Unconditional love does seem somewhat antithetical to romantic love and is certainly at odds with how we want to be loved romantically. If there are reasons for love, as I have argued there are, then there are conditions. On the other hand, we do want commitment and loyalty; to know that we will not be left at the first hurdle. The beloved wants to know that the lover will continue to try to love her, that he will try to look at her in the best possible light, but that when that fails he will remain loyal if possible. The lover who continues to love his beloved, despite her being in the late stages of Alzheimer’s disease and bearing none of the properties she once had, probably does not still love her romantically. However, he may still have a great deal of care and concern for her which are expressions of loving commitment for the woman ‘who was for a long time the object of romantic love and as such partner to an especially cherished union.’[[248]](#footnote-248)

A problem with Delaney’s proposal though, is that part of what it means to make a commitment is that it is *not* ‘always open to renewal’. I do not seem to make a commitment to play hockey every Tuesday if I also tell myself that each Tuesday I may decide whether or not I renew my commitment to play hockey. Rather, I seem to be just telling myself that each Tuesday I will decide whether or not I feel like playing hockey. Perhaps all that Delaney means is that it is always possible to leave one’s partner, and that when one does not leave them, this is decided freely. Nonetheless, this is true of most commitments: it is usually *possible* to break a commitment. Therefore, I wonder if he has underestimated the sort of commitment that would be required to stay with your partner despite them losing most of the qualities for which you once loved them and you consequently no longer romantically loving them. In addition, although Delaney is right that perhaps we don’t actually want to be loved unconditionally, few would be satisfied with their partner telling them ‘I don’t love you, but I’m lovingly committed to you.’

**6.4.3) The desire to form a ‘we’**

One reason why Delaney’s account of love is more successful than the quality view in its simplest form is that he acknowledges that, in addition to valuing the properties of the beloved, the lover cares about being in a distinct kind of relationship with them. Delaney does not claim, as Nozick does, that love *consists* in wanting to form a ‘we’,but rather that the desire to form a ‘we’ is one of the central things people want from a romantic relationship (along with being loved for properties central to your self-conception and loving commitment). He likens the desire to form a ‘we’ to ‘a wish amongst sovereign states to form a republican nation.’[[249]](#footnote-249) Thus, the merging is not total, and some individuality is preserved within an overarching union.[[250]](#footnote-250) Jason would not, for example, want Matilda to become a plumber simply because he is one and he wants them to share their identity. Delaney notes that a major part of the desire to form a ‘we’ is wanting to identify with the beloved. We want the fulfilment of our needs to be ‘*directly connected* to the lover’s well-being.’[[251]](#footnote-251) In addition, he argues, in contrast with Frankfurt, that *mutual* identification is important. Thus, the lover does not want the beloved to identify with all of his needs unless he also identifies with hers. Delaney thinks that this is due to our need to be trusted in a particular kind of way (though he does not clarify which kind), which is necessary in order to achieve psychological intimacy.[[252]](#footnote-252) This feature of Delaney’s ideal of romantic love is important to keep in mind as it highlights how, despite including identification as a feature, it differs from Frankfurt’s ideal of love, in which the desire for union is not a necessary feature and is rather a ‘distracting element.’ However, as I’ll discuss below, Delaney does not explain enough how the desire to form a ‘we’ with another fits with valuing qualities that are central to their self-conception.

**6.5) Three objections to Delaney’s account**

**6.5.1) For all the right properties?**

I think Delaney is right that love for certain peripheral properties, such as having yellow hair or big breasts, do not seem like cases of real love. However, I disagree that we want always to be loved for qualities that we consider to be central to our self-conception. Delaney considers cases where there is a disparity between who one takes oneself to be and who one really is and argues that in these cases we want to be loved for who we take ourselves to be.[[253]](#footnote-253) I disagree: one of the things that we often enjoy about romantic love is the lover’s ability to show us, and draw out of us, qualities that we didn’t know we had. For example, suppose Matilda considers herself a rather shy, boring person with not much to say. By contrast, Jason thinks of her as very witty, and that though she is quiet, whenever she speaks she says something interesting and intelligent. Furthermore, this is one of the reasons for which he loves her. This does not appear to be a case of Jason loving Matilda for the wrong reasons; indeed, she might really value him seeing a side of her that she did not know she had and might even change her self-conception to fit his idea of her. Delaney argues that one of the functions of a romantic lover is to ‘help us to maintain our belief that we have the properties we so highly value about ourselves.’[[254]](#footnote-254) However, although we, of course, want to be valued for those properties about ourselves that we value, we might also want to know if others don’t think we do have those properties. If Jason really wants to be a teacher and believes he possesses all of the properties that would make him a good one, it would help him if Matilda pointed out that he is rather impatient when people aren’t quick to understand things. Romantic lovers, armed with intimate knowledge of their beloveds, are in a very good position to help them find out how they are perceived by the outside world and how they can become more like the people they want to be. Furthermore, as Keller points out, the romantic relationship itself can be a ‘source of personal transformation’. He suggests that the beloved will be loved for properties that she did not even know she had and that this might change the way she sees herself and the possibilities she sees herself having. [[255]](#footnote-255)

Moreover, I think Delaney has underplayed the importance of historical-relational properties. He states that historical-relational properties can be reasons because they are sometimes central to your self-conception, implying that they are not good reasons for love if they are peripheral to your self-conception. However, it seems to me that they would be appropriate reasons for love even if they were not. For example, Matilda would probably like it that one of the reasons Jason loved her is because she makes him laugh, even if she considers herself to be a rather serious person. Furthermore, Delaney argues that the balance between loving someone for their intrinsic and their relational properties is simply a matter of ‘taste and discretion,’[[256]](#footnote-256) which implies that, on his understanding, I could love my beloved solely for their intrinsic properties. This would lead back to the objections discussed in Section 4. It seems that something like historical-relational properties are necessary to differentiate love from admiration. If it was only someone’s intrinsic qualities that I valued then it would be difficult to explain why I loved them rather than admired them. Thus, although by including historical-relational properties, Delaney’s account is superior to the simple version of the quality view, by still allowing intrinsic properties to be grounds for love, it is still subject to many of the criticisms above. In the next chapter I’ll explain why I think that historical-relational properties are reasons for love because they are not only properties of the beloved, but also of the relationship between the lover and the beloved. As the lover values both the beloved and the relationship shared with her, historical-relational features will be especially valued.

**6.5.2) Why a ‘we’ with this particular person?**

Delaney’s account relies on two different views of romantic love: the quality view and Nozick’s view that romantic love consists in the desire to form a ‘we’ with someone. However, he does not fully explain how they fit together; how does an appreciation of the qualities of the beloved lead to and/or follow from a desire to form a ‘we’ with her? For Nozick, ‘you can fall in love with someone because of certain characteristics and you can continue to delight in these; but eventually you must love the person himself, and not *for* the characteristics, not, at any rate, for any delimited list of them.’[[257]](#footnote-257) The reason you love the person after the ‘we’ has been formed is that they are part of the ‘we’ with you. Thus, the reason, for Nozick, why we don’t seek to ‘trade up’ is because that would involve ‘a willingness to destroy yourself in the form of your own extended self’ (i.e. the ‘we’).[[258]](#footnote-258)

Delaney, on the other hand, does not say that romantic love *consists in* the desire to form a ‘we’; romantic love, for Delaney, is still grounded in the properties for the beloved. However, it is not clear from his account why valuing certain properties of a person makes it appropriate to desire to form a ‘we’ with them. He suggests that in an ideal relationship the lovers ‘regularly opt for one another in the robust sense required for each to ground feelings of self-affirmation.’[[259]](#footnote-259) By this he means that we want to continually be chosen for qualities central to our self-conception as a way of confirming our value to ourselves. However, he doesn’t fully explain why or how the lovers continually choose each other and, furthermore, it sounds as if their main aim is to affirm their self-conception rather than to care for each other.

In addition, Delaney does not indicate which comes first: the desire to form a ‘we’ with X or an appreciation of their qualities. Is there a causal relationship between the desire and the appreciation or do they both just come together by chance? It would be good to know whether the qualities of the beloved or the ‘we’ shared with them is more important in explaining love. If the former, then we might expect the lover to stop wanting to be in a ‘we’ with the beloved when her qualities change, and if the latter, we might wonder what the role of the qualities is after the ‘we’ has been formed. This is significant, since, if Matilda loves Jason because they form a ‘we’ together, and this is something that she values, then his properties might be important only insofar as they allow them to share a ‘we’. If so, then Kolodny’s relationship account, which I will discuss in the following chapter, might be more appropriate for explaining romantic love.

**6.5.3) How does love ‘track’ changes in the beloved?**

The third objection I wish to discuss is identified by Keller regarding Delaney’s notion of love’s plasticity. Love being ‘plastic’ means that in an ideal romantic relationship, the lover’s love will track the changes in the beloved’s qualities so that the lover continues to love her for her properties even though they have changed.[[260]](#footnote-260) As Keller notes, this ‘tracking’, as Delaney describes it, appears to happen merely by chance and thus we cannot be confident that our lovers will continue to love us despite changes in our qualities.[[261]](#footnote-261) If love is based on certain beliefs about the qualities of the beloved, then for love to track the changes in the beloved, the lover also has to change her beliefs, and her responses to these beliefs, on a regular basis. This probably often does happen somewhat by chance, but I think Keller is right that in ideal romantic love the tracking would not be merely coincidental. Keller’s own response to this problem, however, is insufficient. He suggests that in an ideal relationship, lovers will share all transformative experiences so that they will change together.[[262]](#footnote-262) Whilst this is partly true, some experiences will be much more significant to one partner than the other, for example if one of their mothers dies, and even if a couple share a transformative experience, they might respond to the experience very differently and it could drive a wedge between them rather than bring them closer together. In addition, sometimes people just change gradually, without necessarily having a transformative experience. Thus, Keller’s explanation can account for the ‘tracking’ process only in a limited number of cases.

Further, Delaney’s notions of ‘historical-relational properties’ and ‘loving commitment’ do not explain the tracking process either. If some of the reasons Jason loves Matilda are that she taught him the piano, helped him through the death of his mother and because she makes him laugh, these do not necessarily entail that he will continue loving her after she has changed her interests substantially. Indeed, if she changes, he may reconceptualise her historical-relational properties in light of these. For example, if she becomes more interested in high-culture, he might look back on her teaching him the piano and see it as her trying to change him and thus strike this off the list of historical-relational qualities for which he loves her. In addition, although being lovingly committed to someone gives us reason to love them, and hence to seek out what is lovable in them, if their qualities change so much that they are very different to the person we lovingly committed to, it may be difficult to keep our commitments to them. This might be even more true if loving commitment is ‘always open to renewal’ as Delaney describes it.

**7) Conclusion**

At the beginning of this chapter I began with the problem that, although Frankfurt can explain why love feels the way it does, he cannot explain why we have that feeling towards some people and not others, or why we love people romantically. Appraisal must, therefore, play a role in love, particularly in romantic love, which is selective and conditional and so it seems, at first glance, like this means that we love people for their properties. It is Matilda’s qualities that set her apart from others and that make Jason choose her on whom to focus his attention in the first place. However, the idea that we love people for their properties faces many problems that Frankfurt, for whom love comes prior to appraisal, does not. For example, the quality theorist cannot explain why love sustains itself despite changes in the qualities of the beloved, or why a positive valuation of Matilda’s qualities causes Jason to love her but her work colleague to admire her.

Both Keller and Delaney overcome some of the objections to the quality view, though neither account responds adequately to all of them. Keller’s and Delaney’s accounts are more convincing than the simple quality view because they acknowledge that, although we love people for their properties, the kind of relationship we have with them is also important. Delaney does this through his account of the ‘we’ and Keller does it by arguing that the kinds of qualities for which we love people are those that make them a good romantic partner. Thus, their accounts offer responses to the objection that the quality theorist cannot distinguish between modes of love and cannot account for the significance of the relationship to the lovers. Furthermore, by including historical-relational characteristics (Keller just refers to relational qualities, but he seems to mean largely the same thing as Delaney), they can explain how a person can be loved for her properties but still be non-fungible.

However, both want to maintain that love is grounded in the qualities of the beloved, at least some of which are intrinsic, and all may be. This means that even if part of what we want from romantic love just is to have a particular kind of relationship, the beloved is loved because their properties make them a good ‘accessory to the relationship,’ as Kolodny puts it.[[263]](#footnote-263) Thus, the other objections to the quality view remain. Firstly, it is still unclear from their accounts how love differs from admiration and why love is a fitting response to the beloved. Historical-relational properties help with distinguishing between love and admiration, but they are not necessary reasons for love on either Keller’s or Delaney’s accounts. Furthermore, neither of their responses to the worry that love grounded in qualities cannot withstand changes in the beloved’s qualities or opportunities to ‘trade-up’ are satisfactory. Keller’s suggestions that lovers change together and become better romantic partners through being in a romantic relationship do not apply in all cases and Delaney’s idea that love is ‘plastic’ makes it seems merely coincidental that love changes along with the beloved.

Nonetheless, it does seem that we have to make some reference to the beloved’s qualities in order to account for why we can love only some people romantically and not others. Keller and Delaney are right that we want to be loved, in part at least, for properties of a certain kind and that when we love another we delight in their properties. In order to account for the inconsistencies in the way that we experience love, love must be grounded in something other than the beloved’s qualities but which allows us to feel as though we love her properties. Indeed, the most convincing points that Keller and Delaney make are mainly those regarding the romantic relationship, such as desiring to be in a ‘we’ with the beloved and loving them for historical-relational properties. In the next chapter I will defend Kolodny’s view that love is grounded in the relationship shared with the beloved, though their qualities are what cause us to be able to be in a relationship with them.

**Chapter Four: What is the role of the romantic relationship in explaining why we love the particular people that we do?**

**1) Introduction**

To recap: the overall questions in which I am interested are why do we have a conception of romantic love that includes sexual and emotional exclusivity[[264]](#footnote-264) and, moreover, what kind of value (if any) does a monogamous romantic relationship have? In order to answer these questions, I need to understand what romantic love is, how it is different from other types of love and what makes it important, or the kind of relationship one might want in one's life. In the previous chapter I concluded that love must be grounded on more than a person’s qualities. In this chapter, I consider Niko Kolodny’s account of love. He agrees that love is a rational response to a person, but argues that the reason we have for loving people is the value of the relationship we share with them, not their qualities. While Kolodny acknowledges that the properties of a person do matter with regard to love, he argues that they are important only insofar as they attract the lover to the beloved. Once a relationship has taken root, it is the relationship that grounds and justifies the love, not the qualities of the beloved. This view differs from Keller’s and Delaney’s since, although they both observe that relational properties might be among those that can justify love, they argue that intrinsic properties are also central in grounding love. Furthermore, although they both acknowledge that one of the things we want from romantic love is a particular kind of relationship; neither of them claim that this relationship grounds the love. I will argue that Kolodny’s theory of love is more convincing than the accounts we have considered thus far.

Nonetheless, he does not provide a full enough conception of romantic love in order to answer the questions of this thesis. There are four questions that still need to be answered:

1. Why are relationships valuable in the first place?
2. Why are romantic relationships typically monogamous?
3. What is the role and significance of sex in romantic relationships?
4. What is the difference between romantic love and friendship?

These four gaps will be filled in subsequent chapters in order to help us to understand the value of monogamy.

**2) The relationship view**

Kolodny argues that relationships provide the reasons for love. Put succinctly, he proposes that, ‘the reason one has for loving Jane, in any given case, is that she is one’s daughter, sister, mother, friend, or wife.’[[265]](#footnote-265) Therefore, it is relationships that make love appropriate rather than the properties of the beloved, though these might be the reason for wanting to form a love-generating relationship with that person in the first place: ‘although a person’s qualities may serve as reasons for wanting, as well as seeking to cultivate, a friendship or romantic relationship with that person, they are not reasons for the attitudes of friendship and romantic love that sustain the relationship once it is formed.’[[266]](#footnote-266) Instead, the reason for having the attitude of love towards a person is the value of the relationship shared with them.

‘Love, moreover, partly *consists* in the belief that some relationship renders it appropriate, and the emotions and motivations of love are *causally sustained* by this belief (except in pathological cases). Special concern for a person is not love at all when there is no belief that a relationship renders it appropriate.’[[267]](#footnote-267)

The relationship makes love a ‘fitting’ response to a person in the same way that a wrongdoing makes anger a fitting response to the wrongdoer. In order to love a person you must believe that love is the right response to the relationship you have with them. Concern for a homeless person you see in the street is not love unless you share a relationship with them. Kolodny’s view is in line with Samuel Schleffler’s claim that being in a relationship with someone makes certain attitudes, behaviours, desires and emotions appropriate. This is in opposition to the view that the appropriateness of our attitudes and actions is determined only by the interactions we have had with people.[[268]](#footnote-268) Furthermore, Scheffler argues that it may be impossible to have special concern for a person if one does not believe that the relationship shared with them generates special claims and responsibilities on either or both of your parts.[[269]](#footnote-269) For example, I will find it possible to have special concern for a fellow British citizen, whom I have never met, only if I see our relationship of ‘members of the same country’ as one which generates claims on or responsibilities towards each other. One reason that a relationship generates responsibilities is because, if it is done well, it enhances the well-being of the participants. Thus, a relationship which undermines rather than enhances human flourishing does not generate responsibilities because the participants have no reason to value it.[[270]](#footnote-270)

Kolodny’s argument is in clear opposition to Frankfurt, who believes that it is possible to love someone with whom one is not in a relationship: ‘I may love a woman, with no opportunity to affect her in any way; and she may have no inkling that I exist.’[[271]](#footnote-271) Indeed, Kolodny explicitly states that he does not think that Frankfurt accounts for love correctly. Perhaps the most noteworthy of the several arguments he raises against Frankfurt is that Frankfurt cannot distinguish love from mere urges.[[272]](#footnote-272) To illustrate this point, Kolodny supposes that one day he just wakes up with a strong urge, or ‘first-order desire’, in Frankfurtian language, to help his daughter’s classmate, Fred Simmons, whom he has never met before and knows only by name. He also has the second-order desire to sustain this urge. However, he sees no point in picking Fred out as the object of his desire; he does not consider his relationship with Fred Simmons to be of the kind to render it appropriate to help him. Kolodny argues that, in this case, his urge to help Fred would not count as love. This would still be true if, in addition to desiring to help Fred, he also has an inexplicable urge for Fred’s company and to be emotionally vulnerable to him. Kolodny acknowledges that Frankfurt would not appeal to concrete desires and emotions such as these; he includes these additions to show that love is not a basic desire or emotion *even if* accompanied by emotions and concrete desires. What is needed to make Kolodny’s feelings towards Fred count as love, ‘is [his] appreciation of reasons for these attitudes, reasons of the kind that [he] appreciates in the case of [his] love for [his] daughter.’ Thus, Kolodny argues that love must be ‘normatively appropriate’:[[273]](#footnote-273) it consists not only of urges, desires, and emotions; it is an attitude held towards a person for normative reasons which we can understand and of which we can approve.

However, Kolodny rejects the idea that the reasons for love are the qualities of the beloved. He discusses five problems with the quality view, which he uses to support his own model of love. The first is that it cannot explain familial love; we do not love our family becauseof their qualities. The second is (as discussed in the previous chapter) that it cannot explain different modes of love; why, for example, does my mother’s friend love her in a different way from the way that I love her, and would do even if we knew about exactly the same qualities of my mother?[[274]](#footnote-274) The relationship view does not share these problems since, if the reason for love isthe relationship, then we love people in different modes because we have different kinds of relationships with them. The last three problems Kolodny raises relate specifically to friendship and romantic love. These are the problems of: ‘constancy, nonsubstitutability, and amnesia.’[[275]](#footnote-275) The constancy objection is the idea that, if the beloved is loved for her qualities, then she ought to stop being loved when she loses those qualities. However, such conditionality seems antithetical to love. On the relationship account, love is tenacious because, ‘the relationship remains, even as qualities change.’[[276]](#footnote-276) Therefore, Kolodny is able to explain the constancy of love though the quality view struggles. Kolodny’s fourth objection is that the quality theorist would have just as much reason to love her beloved’s doppelgänger as her beloved, because they both share the same qualities. However, this does not fit with how we think about love; we believe that our beloveds are irreplaceable to us.[[277]](#footnote-277) On the relationship view, the doppelgänger would not be loved as much as the beloved, if at all, because the lover does not share a meaningful relationship with him.[[278]](#footnote-278)

Kolodny’s final objection – the amnesia problem – also provides support for his view. He gives an example of a biographer who spent some time in his late fifties writing about a political activist. Later on, the biographer starts a relationship with her and they fall in love. A few years later he suffers a special kind of memory loss, remembering everything up until just before their relationship started, but nothing from after they got together. He thus still knows all about her qualities from writing her biography, but he does not remember that he shared a relationship with her. In such a situation we would expect him to stop loving her but, assuming she has not changed much since he wrote her biography, on the quality view we can’t explain why.[[279]](#footnote-279) Kolodny can, of course, since the biographer no longer believes himself to have a relationship with her that makes love an appropriate response.

Kolodny distinguishes relationships from other kinds of interpersonal relations by describing them as patterns of interaction that are:

1. ongoing,
2. between particular people,
3. historical.

By ‘ongoing’ he means that they exist for a period of time, and thus momentary relations do not count as relationships. They exist ‘between particular people’ in that relationships exist between non-fungible individuals, as opposed to general relations that exist between non-specific people, such as the relation between a (any) teacher and a (any) pupil. Although there is some sort of relation between these non-specific people, a relationship does not exist until there is a particular teacher and a particular pupil to share it. Finally, by ‘historical’, Kolodny means that relationships must have a history. He contrasts relations that are ongoing but not historical, such as ‘sitting to the left of someone,’ which depends only on the present situation. You can sit to the left of someone whether or not you have previously been sitting to their left. Conversely, you can be someone’s friend only if you have some story about how you became their friend, if you have some shared history. These three criteria are necessary for a relationship to exist in which love is appropriate, but not sufficient.[[280]](#footnote-280) The relationship and the beloved must also be valued by the lover; relationships do not just automatically give rise to love. Love, for Kolodny, is a kind of valuing for which one believes one has appropriate reasons. It ‘consists (a) in seeing a relationship in which one is involved as a reason for valuing both one’s relationship and the person with whom one has that relationship, and (b) in valuing that relationship and person accordingly.’[[281]](#footnote-281) Kolodny goes into further detail about what this means by giving the following constituents of love:

1. J must see his relationship with M as a reason to do certain things for her and to be emotionally vulnerable to her.
2. J cares for M non-instrumentally. He does not use her ‘as a mere accessory to or component of a relationship.’[[282]](#footnote-282)
3. J is emotionally vulnerable to M, for example her being upset makes him feel sad.
4. J believes that anyone who shares a relationship that is sufficiently similar to the one that he shares with M ought to love their partner. As Kolodny puts it: if a mother recognised that she had reason to love her child, but did not believe that other mothers have reasons to love their children, we would question her love.
5. J believes he has a non-instrumental reason to act in the interest of M and of their relationship.
6. J and M’s relationship gives non-participants, who value J and M’s type of relationship, reasons to act in certain ways towards them. For example, if I see romantic relationships as valuable then I will see myself as having reason not to undermine other people’s romantic relationships.
7. J’s reasons for acting in certain ways towards M are “agent-relative”: the reasons exist only because he is in that relationship with her.[[283]](#footnote-283)

Thus, if J behaves in these ways and has these beliefs, attitudes and desires, then he loves M. These constituents make up a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for love. Kolodny wants to retain the idea that the beloved is loved for herself, though she, herself, does not ground the love (compare to Keller and Delaney’s arguments that the beloved is loved for herself, though the love is justified by her qualities). Thus, he suggests that: ‘love has a single ground (one’s relationship) but two foci (one’s relationship and one’s relative).’[[284]](#footnote-284) It seems fair to say that love has two foci – people do often claim to love their relationship as well as their partner, and when they break up they often miss the relationship in addition to each other.[[285]](#footnote-285) The relationship can almost feel like a separate entity, taking on a life of its own. As I argued in the previous chapter, this is something the quality view has difficulty accounting for.

One might assume that if the relationship is the ground of the love, then the love should continue for as long as the relationship does; but Kolodny does not think his view entails this, arguing instead that when you are in a relationship with a person you are not ‘locked into it.’[[286]](#footnote-286) If you no longer value the relationship appropriately, you will no longer have reason to love your partner. The relationship does not exist in abstraction from its participants, so it is possible for one partner to change in such a way as to make a relationship with them become unpleasant and thus to diminish its value. He gives several reasons for why it might be appropriate to stop feeling loving concern for someone. These are:

‘when one learns that one no longer has (or never had) a relationship marked by the presence and expression of mutual concern, when one finds that one can no longer go forward on the footing of equality that such a relationship requires, or when one no longer recognises the person before one as the person with whom one once had a relationship.’

For example, if you learn that your partner never really loved you, but was using you for your money, then you might rightly stop loving them, since your love would be based on an illusion of a valuable relationship. Alternatively, if your partner develops an attitude of superiority over you, then you might feel that the relationship is no longer of the kind to make love appropriate. Kolodny rightly points out that it seems inappropriate – though not blameworthy – to stop caring about someone for no reason.[[287]](#footnote-287) Although sometimes it can feel like you have just fallen out of love with someone, there is usually a reason that can be posited. The reasons that Kolodny deems to be appropriate are those that entail that you can no longer share a relationship with them which would make love a fitting response; in other words, you no longer value your relationship and so there is no longer any ground to your love.[[288]](#footnote-288)

Kolodny admits that he is unsure whether loss of attraction, which he describes as the loss of the desire to share certain activities with a person, is an appropriate reason to stop loving someone. He suggests that, although loss of attraction might make you want to withdraw from engaging in certain activities with your beloved, such as sex, it shouldn’t make you lose concern for them. Thus, although loss of attraction might end your relationship as ‘a specifically romantic relationship’ it needn’t end your relationship altogether. This is because you loved them, ‘not as an accomplice in these activities, but as one’s friend or lover.’ You valued more than just the shared activities; you also valued the relationship that was constituted partly by mutual non-instrumental concern.[[289]](#footnote-289) This seems true: when we lose attraction to a loved one we don’t automatically stop caring about them altogether, though we may feel that we no longer love them romantically.

As well as the loss of it being a reason to end a relationship, Kolodny argues that it is attraction which gives us a reason to begin a relationship with someone. He suggests that before a relationship of friendship or romantic love takes root, it is a person’s non-relational qualities that attract us to them. However, after the relationship is established he posits that the relationship itself might ‘become an insistent reason for attraction’, though he is not sure.[[290]](#footnote-290) He argues that attraction is what makes possible the kind of interaction from which non-instrumental concern develops. It does this in one of two ways. Firstly, it is ‘a reason *to pursue and sustain* the relevant kind of interaction with that person.’ This is because, when we are attracted to someone, we not only appreciate their qualities; we believe that their qualities will make engaging in certain activities with them ‘pleasurable or otherwise rewarding’.[[291]](#footnote-291) If the other person feels the same way about us, we will begin engaging in activities with one another and, before long, we will share a relationship that will give rise to non-instrumental concern. In cases where people are ‘thrust together’, (Kolodny gives the example of prisoners of war) another way in which attraction might give rise to friendship or romantic love is by making their interaction ‘of the relevant kind’. Thus, two prisoners of war might have to interact with one another in order to get by. If, however, they begin ‘enjoying leisure time together and sharing a sense of humour’, then we might say that their interaction is ‘of the relevant kind’ to be called friendship and thus their relationship will begin to give rise to feelings of love. Kolodny suggests that they may find it impossible to enjoy leisure time together with one another without being attracted to each other. Therefore, without attraction, the pair would be unable to interact with each other in a way that could be called friendship.[[292]](#footnote-292)

In summary, Kolodny argues, *contra* Frankfurt, that there are reasons which justify love. He also argues against the claim made by the quality view that these reasons are the non-relational properties of the beloved. Instead, love is justified by the relationship had with the beloved, though it is focussed on both the beloved herself and on the relationship. However, as friendship and romantic love are ‘attitude dependent’ they rely on attraction, and thus, the qualities of the beloved are important in helping us to develop the kinds of relationships which generate love. In the next section I’ll explain how this theory overcomes the problems faced by the quality view.

**3) The strengths of the relationship view**

**3.1) Why it makes sense that the relationship provides reasons for love**

We see the desire to be in a relationship with one’s beloved to be intrinsic to loving them (romantically) and, more often than not, what causes people to fall out of love with one another is the breakdown of the relationship. Furthermore, though when we consider why we love people we might begin by listing their qualities, we will also usually think about the valuable relationship we share with them. As Kolodny puts it, ‘ask yourself why you love your friend or spouse. Your thoughts will naturally turn to your shared history with him or her. He or she is someone with whom you “go way back” or with whom you have shared your life’.[[293]](#footnote-293) When we are deliberating over whether to leave someone or to ‘trade-up’ it will often be our shared history with them that draws us back to them. James might have better qualities than Jason, but the shared history between Jason and Matilda stops her from leaving Jason for James. Each relationship we have is unique and, therefore, irreplaceable.

Furthermore, romantic love, more than other kinds of love, requires regular contact and interaction between the lovers. This might be why we deem attraction to be so important for romantic love – it makes regular interaction enjoyable. Two friends might consider themselves friends despite not having seen or spoken to each other for a year. However, the same can be said of romantic lovers only if they are prevented from contacting each other through circumstances beyond their control, such as war or imprisonment. If they have simply not gotten around to getting in contact with each other for several months, then we would say that their relationship is over. Moreover, it simply does not make sense to love someone with whom one does not share, or has not previously shared, some kind of relationship.[[294]](#footnote-294) Thus, we can only reasonably call unrequited love ‘love’ at all, if there is some shared history between the lover and the beloved, such as a friendship, or a romantic relationship which has broken down. As Kolodny puts it, unrequited love is ‘an unrequited desire for a relationship.’ The unrequited lover wants to be in the sort of relationship with her beloved that would make her love appropriate and reciprocated. As Kolodny observes, love simply doesn’t make sense without at least some shared history.[[295]](#footnote-295) I cannot love someone whom I have just met, and if I think I do it will be because of a desired or imagined relationship with them. Romantic love depends for its existence upon a historical relationship that aims at its own continuation and at reciprocity. This provides further evidence against the quality view: if the reasons for love are the intrinsic qualities of the beloved then a relationship with them would be unnecessary. As I argued in the previous chapter, what Delaney calls ‘historical-relational features’ are essential in distinguishing love from admiration. However, his explanation for why they are appropriate grounds of love – that they are sometimes central to a person’s self-conception – is insufficient. The relationship view explains the significance of historical-relational features much more convincingly: they remind the lover of the relationship she shares with her beloved and they partly constitute that relationship which forms the basis for love.

The relationship view can also explain the phenomenon of loving the relationship, which the quality view had difficulty explaining. As described by Thomas Smith, ‘each one of two lovers may love, not just the other but the *two of them,* collectively.’[[296]](#footnote-296) As I mentioned briefly above, when we break up with people we often miss the relationship as well as our ex-partner. Jason and Matilda love each other, but they also love themselves as a joint identity; they love them as the couple, ‘Jason *and* Matilda’. As evidence for this idea, Smith points to activities that couples do together ‘such as snuggling up, or holding hands, or going for walks, or chatting together about the day’s events, or looking into each other’s eyes, or simply *rubbing along together* (sharing the same space)’. Such activities, Smith argues, are engaged in ‘*disinterestedly,* for they need have no further end – no “completion” – in sight.’[[297]](#footnote-297) They are valuable actions because they affirm the intrinsic value of the relationship, rather than being instrumental in creating value. Furthermore, such activities are, at times, irresistible, showing the extent to which the couple want to express the value of their relationship.[[298]](#footnote-298) Indeed, sometimes the desire to be physically affectionate with one’s partner can feel rather urgent; for example, Jason might want to sleep next to Matilda so much that he travels across the city just to do so. Smith compares these activities to ‘treating oneself’ in cases where one does something of non-instrumental value for oneself, such as having a hot bath, in order to express self-love.[[299]](#footnote-299) Similarly, couple’s snuggles and kisses have non-instrumental value; they are valuable, not only because they express love to each other, but also because they express to one another that they love themselves as a joint entity. Neither Frankfurt, nor the quality theorist, can account for the significance of these activities to romantic couples. For Frankfurt, neither affection nor a desire to be with the beloved is a component of love. For the quality theorist, such activities seem unnecessary for love since if Matilda loves Jason because she values some of his qualities, this does not necessarily give her reason to non-instrumentally value their relationship. However, we can understand the value of these expressive, non-instrumental acts on the relationship view, since, if love consists in valuing a relationship, it makes sense for the lovers to want to express their love for their relationship as well as for each other.

In addition, Kolodny’s account seems obviously right as an explanation of familial love. We want to be loved by our family simply by virtue of being their family member. If a mother is asked why she loves her daughter, we expect her to say ‘because she’s my daughter.’ Indeed, if she gives any other response, such as, ‘because she’s intelligent and sweet’, or ‘I don’t know, I just do’, we may think that she does not love her daughter in the way that she should. In opposition to the quality view, Kolodny remarks, ‘it would be bizarre to answer someone who asked why I was so concerned about this woman in particular with a list of traits, instead of the decisive fact that she is my mother.’[[300]](#footnote-300) The grounds of love between family members just are the relationships they share with one another.

You love your children whatever their qualities, as long as they have the property of being *your* children. This does not mean that you cannot delight in and admire their qualities. Indeed, it is usually very important to us that our family members hold us in high esteem. I want to be liked, as well as loved, by my mother; I want her to value my qualities. However, the relationship is the ultimate ground of the love and, indeed, is what gives us reason to appreciate our family members’ qualities. Furthermore, we expect or at least hope for our family members to love us even if they don’t like us very much. Dixon suggests that, ‘in the best situations, our love for family members is overdetermined, in that it is both rigid [‘regardless of characteristics’] and quality-based. For instance, while ever since their birth I have loved my children *qua* my children, I have also grown to love them because of their particular qualities.’[[301]](#footnote-301) Thus, the relationship anchors you to your children, meaning that you love them ‘rigidly’, no matter what they are like. However, this relationship gives you reason to come to value their qualities in a special way and you may come to feel as though you love them for their properties as well as for your relationship.

**3.2) Combining the relationship view and Jollimore’s ‘love’s vision’: a way out of the paradox of love?**

By making the relationship the ground of love, the relationship view is able to overcome the paradox of love. This is that Jason wants Matilda to hold him in high esteem and to delight in and appreciate his qualities, but he also wants her to be committed to him and to continue to love him at times when she doesn’t like or admire him very much. In addition, he doesn’t want to be fungible with someone with identical qualities to him, or for Matilda to be willing to ‘trade-up’ if she meets someone with better qualities. In other words, he wants to be loved for his qualities but also not to be. As Shand puts it, we want love to ‘be freely chosen yet not something someone who loves us could choose not to be possessed by.’[[302]](#footnote-302) We want love to be the sort of thing that can end, but also to know that it never will. Delaney tries to overcome this inconsistency in people’s desires by introducing the concept of ‘loving commitment’ which is ‘a sincere willingness to attend to the other’s interests and needs, and reflects a choice to sustain the relationship at its customary degree of intimacy, a choice that is always open to renewal and always freely renewed.’[[303]](#footnote-303) However, as I argued in the previous chapter, a problem with this idea is that being ‘always open to renewal’ is inconsistent with the very notion of it being a commitment. Moreover, the idea of ‘loving commitment’ does not really solve the problem; we want our lovers to remain with us, not due to a commitment, but out of love. Jason does not want Matilda to refrain from trading-up just because she is committed to him; he wants her to do it because she loves him. Furthermore, he wants her to be unable to stop loving him. He wants her love for him to exclude the possibility of ‘trading-up’ from even entering her mind. This is the same with familial love: I don’t want my mother to help me out because of a felt commitment to me; I want her to do it out of love.[[304]](#footnote-304)

I suggest that the relationship view and Jollimore’s idea of ‘love’s vision’ offer us a way out of this paradox. The underlying reason for love is the value of the relationship, which means that love will continue as long as the relationship remains, but the relationship is made possible only because of the qualities of the beloved. Therefore, Matilda values Jason’s qualities, both intrinsic and relational, insofar as they contribute to or remind her of the relationship she shares with him. In other words, his qualities ‘piggyback’ on the relationship in terms of providing reasons for love, but the relationship is its ultimate ground. His qualities attract her to him in a way that makes a relationship with him possible and his historical-relational properties remind her of their shared relationship and partly constitute it. Consequently, Matilda will continue to love Jason through rocky patches in the relationship, but if he changes so much that they can no longer have a relationship that is valuable to her she will probably fall out of love with him. One difference between familial love and romantic love is that in familial love the relationships on which the love is based are much more permanent and exist in some form regardless of the attitudes of the participants. The relationships between friends and lovers, on the other hand, must be built and maintained, and depend somewhat on the qualities of the lovers, but also on the effort they put into the relationship. This is why the love felt between friends and lovers can decline and end as the relationship between them breaks down, whereas it is rarer for family members to stop loving each other. It is also why it is more important for lovers and friends to be attracted by each other’s qualities than for family members. I will continue to have a relationship with my sister even if I do not like her qualities, but I will probably break up with my partner (or would simply not have started a relationship with him) if I am not attracted by any of his qualities.

In addition, similar to familial love and friendship, the romantic relationship gives the lover a reason to get to know and appreciate her beloved’s qualities. Thus, Jason might come to value qualities of Matilda simply because he is in a position to be able to see them, and thus they remind him of the close relationship they share. Through their intimacy, he will come to know her in a way that others do not, and will see, for example, that though she often appears rude, really she is just very shy. Furthermore, if it is the relationship, rather than the qualities, that is the ultimate ground of love, we can understand the experience of coming to love one’s partner’s qualities that one does not find objectively attractive, and even that one finds objectively unattractive. For example, Jason might come to love the way Matilda lets out a little snort when she laughs. Such qualities are not valued intrinsically, nor are they valued purely because they belong to Matilda; if Jason and Matilda broke up he might begin to find her snort annoying and unattractive. Instead, these sorts of qualities are valued by Jason *because* Matilda is his partner and this gives him a reason to value her properties. Indeed, among the qualities of Matilda that Jason values might be those which he knows about only through the intimacy of their relationship, such as the way Matilda snores. It does not matter whether he deems them objectively attractive or unattractive, what matters is that they remind him of their relationship which he loves and values. Thus, in a sense, love itself provides a reason for love, but not in a problematically circular way. The properties of Matilda are what make the relationship with Jason that grounds their love possible. The value of this relationship provides Jason with a reason to further strengthen the relationship by valuing Matilda’s qualities. In other words, when we love, we want that love to expand and become stronger; therefore, loving someone gives us a reason to find them lovable.

Jollimore’s account of love helps us to understand how and why we come to appreciate our beloved’s qualities when we are in a relationship with them. He suggests that loving someone requires seeing them through ‘love’s vision’, which is a way of seeing the beloved that involves ‘looking for value’[[305]](#footnote-305) and ‘appreciating the properties she bears as an *object* and identifying with her as a *subject.*’[[306]](#footnote-306) Love’s vision thus entails making an effort to value the qualities of the beloved, as well as understanding and identifying with her as an ever-changing individual. It is ‘to see the world with the beloved at the centre and to see his attributes in a certain generous light’[[307]](#footnote-307); it is ‘the sort of close, generous, and imaginative attention that allows valuable features of this sort fully to reveal themselves.’[[308]](#footnote-308) Furthermore, it is ‘to see the rest of the world, to some degree, through his eyes, to allow his values, judgments, and emotions to have an effect on *your* perceptions.’[[309]](#footnote-309) The lover who sees the beloved with love’s vision will continue to love the beloved despite changes in his properties because she is not expecting him to remain the same but is always looking at him with openness to whatever value might reveal itself.[[310]](#footnote-310)

I think that if we combine Kolodny’s account with Jollimore’s ‘loves vision’ we can see why romantic love is also ‘overdetermined’ in the way that Dixon describes i.e. that it is both, to a degree, held ‘rigidly’ and is due to the qualities of the beloved. This explains why romantic love can be so tenacious. Being in a valued relationship with someone gives us a reason to look at our beloved with ‘love’s vision’ and vice versa – looking at someone with ‘love’s vision’ gives us reason to want to be in a close relationship with them. This seems circular, but it is not problematically so, because our reasons for falling in love with someone can be different from our reasons for staying in love with them. Matilda might fall in love with Jason because of his qualities (both intrinsic and relational) but it is their relationship and her viewing him with love’s vision, that make her continue to love him. This explains why love is somewhat in our control but not completely. We have a degree of choice over the perspective with which we view the beloved: if they are generally very relaxed we can see them as calm or lazy; if they are very kind to everyone we can find this lovely or dull. If Matilda makes no effort to see Jason in a good light, he has reason to be hurt by and angry with her. We may not be able to commit to loving someone as such, but we can commit to trying to view them in the best possible way. Nonetheless, there are limits to our ability to control the way we see people: sometimes we just cannot help but find someone’s traits irritating or objectionable and, as Kolodny observes, sometimes our beloveds will act in such a way as to make us lose respect for them. If my beloved takes on new political beliefs that I abhor I might find it impossible to look at him through ‘love’s vision’ and consequently need to end the relationship with him.

The relationship view thus, in a way, provides a bridge between Frankfurt’s model of love and the quality view, giving us a way to keep the most resonant parts of both theories and overcome the paradox of love. It shows us why valuing the beloved’s qualities – both intrinsic and relational – is essential for romantic love, but also why this is not the whole story. Furthermore, it provides an explanation as to why the lover bestows value onto the beloved, coming to appreciate his qualities simply because they are his and it helps us to understand why we might continue to love someone despite knowing that they are bad for us – we might still value the relationship and have come to value their objectively bad qualities because of this.

**3.3) How the relationship view explains why love is different from liking or admiration**

At the end of the last chapter I concluded that the quality theorist was unable to explain why the lover feels non-instrumental concern for her beloved. As the (favourable) qualities of the beloved can be the objects of several appropriate responses, such as envy or admiration, we need to know why the lover responds to them with love instead. The relationship theorist is in a better position to do this for a few reasons. Firstly, relationships make non-instrumental concern possible; secondly they make it appropriate; thirdly, non-instrumental concern is partly constitutive of some relationships. I will now go through these reasons in turn.

First: the relationship is a necessary precondition for love. It is impossible to love someone with whom we have never shared a historical and on-going pattern of interaction. As Kolodny points out, concern for someone with whom you have had no interaction is not a case of genuine love.[[311]](#footnote-311) People do sometimes claim to love people whom they have never met, such as celebrities, but we usually think that these are cases of infatuation, fantasy, or lust, rather than genuine love. Sharing a relationship with one’s beloved is necessary for love because we need to know and understand them in order to identify with and care for them, and because we need to be close enough to them to be able to act on our concern for them. Jason needs to have sufficient knowledge of Matilda in order to care about her. He cannot care about her well-being if he does not know what her desires and needs are. Furthermore, the more detailed the knowledge he has of her, the more he is able to care about her. This was raised as a criticism against Frankfurt’s account in Chapter Two. He claims that it is possible to love someone who does not know you exist. However, I argued that the more intimate your relationship with your beloved is, the better you are able to care for them. Therefore, romantic lovers, through having such an all-encompassing relationship, are very well-positioned to love each other. Thus, one reason why we respond to some people with love rather than admiration is that the relationship we share with them makes love possible. Frankfurt is probably right that we have a deep human need to love others, and that, in a sense, we love some people because it is possible to love them, though he does not elaborate on what makes it possible. Though Frankfurt would not agree that relationships are necessary for love, Kolodny’s account could fill in this gap in Frankfurt’s theory.

A second reason why we respond to some people with love, rather than admiration, is that love is a fitting response to valuing a certain type of relationship. This explains why love can feel arational: once we are in a particular relationship we might find it impossible *not* to love the person with whom we share it. We can value relationships with people even if we know that they are bad for us in many ways. Nevertheless, we can give some reasons for why it is appropriate for some relationships to give rise to love: for example they cultivate empathy and identification with the beloved. They make it possible for us to look at the beloved with ‘love’s vision’ and they might enrich our lives.

Finally, love is partly constitutive of certain kinds of relationships. Therefore, if you are a true friend to Susan, you love her as a friend. If you do not love her then you are not a real friend to her, and, arguably, you and she do not share a friendship. Similarly, if Matilda stops loving Jason, or decides she loves him as a friend rather than a lover, they will have to end or modify their relationship in order to accommodate her changed feelings. If she tells Jason that she has never loved him, he might decide that they were never really in a romantic relationship at all. Thus, in addition to a relationship being a precondition for love, love might be a condition of certain kinds of relationships and so if you are in such a relationship you just do love the other person appropriately.[[312]](#footnote-312) Again, this seems circular: how can the relationship explain and justify the love if the love partly constitutes the relationship? Kolodny addresses this objection, responding that a friendship or a romantic relationship consists of more than just the lover’s present concern. It consists ‘first, in our history of shared concern and activity, and, second, in my friend’s or lover’s present concern for me.’[[313]](#footnote-313) Therefore, the shared history of concern and activity can justify the love which then feeds back into the relationship. Indeed, when a relationship is first developing, love will probably not constitute it at all. Instead, the relationship will form because the lovers are attracted to each other, perhaps because they desire to love and be loved by each other. It is only when the relationship is established and the lovers are in love that it becomes partly constituted by love. This is not problematic though; as I pointed out before, love seeks further entrenchment and expansion and so becomes a reason for itself. However, as Kolodny points out, it is not the only reason to continue the relationship.

**3.4) Summary: How the relationship view overcomes the problems faced by the quality view**

Firstly, as described above, Kolodny can differentiate between love and admiration because love requires a valued relationship with its object whereas admiration does not. This seems right; when we consider those people whom we love, such as our friends, in comparison to those whom we admire, such as our work colleagues and certain political figures, the principle reason for the difference in response to them is that we share a valued relationship with those whom we love. Indeed, I can admire someone whom I have never met, but the same is not true of love.

The relationship view also explains why the lover cares non-instrumentally for the beloved: certain kinds of relationship simply make this a fitting response to them. Thus, if I share an on-going, historical relationship with someone to whom I am attracted, and I value this relationship in a way that makes me feel emotionally vulnerable to them, then I will care about their well-being. In addition, I love the ‘whole person’ and not their properties because, although their properties are what enable me to have a relationship with them, my justification for loving them is the unique relationship I share with them as an ever-changing subject. I will thus find them irreplaceable. Related to this, I will resist opportunities to trade-up, and will continue to love my partner, despite changes in their qualities, as long as they do not change in such a way as to make our relationship impossible or no longer valuable to me. Also, although I may meet others who have better qualities than my beloved, I will not meet anyone who shares the same relationship with me as them. Thus, they will always have something that others do not. Finally, the relationship view can explain why we love people in different modes – we have different modes of relationship; and why we value the relationship as well as the beloved – valuing the relationship is central to love.

**4) Gaps in the relationship view**

Despite its aforementioned strengths as an explanation of why we love particular people romantically, there are some gaps in Kolodny’s relationship account that need addressing in order to answer the questions of this thesis. These are not objections to his account, since his aims are different from mine. Thus, they should read more as questions that still need to be considered in order to address the aims of this thesis. These are:

1. Why are relationships valuable in the first place?
2. Why are romantic relationships typically monogamous?
3. What is the role and significance of sex in romantic relationships?
4. What is the difference between romantic love and friendship?

I will now consider each of these in turn.

**4.1) The value of relationships**

Kolodny’s view is that valuing a relationship will give rise to love. However, he does not explain why relationships are valuable in the first place. In the reasons Kolodny gives for why one might want to end a relationship, he focuses on reasons for why the relation would no longer be an appropriate object of love. For example, an abusive husband would not be an appropriate object of love, on Kolodny’s understanding, as he is failing to act on the reasons his relationship provides. In other words, he is not behaving in a way that is appropriate to that relationship and so love would not generally be a fitting response to the relationship. However, Kolodny does not consider why we should be in love-generating relationships in the first place. The questions of whether relationships are valuable in general, and whether this value outweighs other considerations are of particular importance to romantic love. We don’t usually end relationships with friends and family because we do not want friendship or family in general. However, it is not uncommon to end a romantic relationship because one does not want a romantic relationship at all in one’s life. Romantic relationships tend to require a great deal of time, commitment, energy and sacrifice and some people would prefer to be single. Kolodny’s omission of this reason for ending a romantic relationship suggests that he takes for granted that people want to be in romantic relationships and that he thinks that only reasons internal to the relationship are appropriate reasons for ending the love. Thus, although I think Kolodny is right that love does consist in valuing a relationship, I’d like to know what is so valuable about romantic relationships that makes it intelligible that we ought to have them in our lives.

**4.2) The relationship view and monogamy**

Kolodny does not consider why it is that we ought to have and value specifically monogamous relationships. This is probably because his account of love covers all kinds of love and puts friendship and romantic love in the same category of ‘attitude-dependent relationships’. Nonetheless, a couple of his comments imply that he assumes that romantic relationships are or ought to be monogamous. The first is when he says that acting in the interests of one’s relationship might involve certain constraints, such as the requirement of sexual fidelity.[[314]](#footnote-314) This suggests that Kolodny thinks that a romantic relationship might require sexual exclusivity. The second comment comes in his discussion of the reasons for why a person might leave a relationship. He proposes that:

‘One’s attitudes can change in response to the belief that one’s friend or lover has failed to act on the reasons that the relationship provides, even if he still has the concern that constitutes the relationship. He may simply be weak-willed. Retrospectively, the relationship has been marred by infidelity or betrayal, and prospectively, it is a relationship in which certain kinds of trust may no longer be possible. Insofar as the reason for one’s concern is the value of the relationship that one has for that person, this reason has been undermined.’[[315]](#footnote-315)

By suggesting that the unfaithful partner has ‘failed to act on the reasons that the relationship provides,’ Kolodny implies that the romantic relationship gives a person reasons to be sexually exclusive and that the value of the relationship is, in part, constituted by both partners acting on these reasons. Furthermore, he hints that sexual exclusivity may be more important in determining the value of the relationship than love when he says that sexual infidelity may give a person reason to leave a relationship, ‘even if he [the unfaithful partner] still has the concern that constitutes the relationship.’ There is nothing in his conditions for a relationship (see Section 2: ‘The relationship view’ above) that necessitate monogamy for romantic relationships. This is probably because his theory is general to all loving relationships. Nonetheless, for the purposes of this thesis, we still need to consider why we have a conception of the romantic relationship as, typically, a monogamous relationship and whether monogamy is constitutive of romantic love.

**4.3) The place of sex in romantic relationships**

We usually assume that if romantic lovers desire sex at all, they will desire it with each other at least during part of their relationship. Indeed, sex is usually one of the activities that is held to distinguish romantic relationships from friendships. However, the relationship view does not explain why this should be the case. Kolodny implies that sex is a necessary part of a romantic relationship, arguing that, ‘to the extent that a relationship that was once romantic is no longer structured around the expression of sexual drives, for example, it may make more sense to view it simply as a friendship.’[[316]](#footnote-316) However, he does not explain *why* ‘the expression of sexual drives’ should be an important part of a romantic relationship. When he discusses sexual attraction he makes only the rather obvious observation that when you are sexually attracted to someone you ‘view his or her charms as [...] making sex with him or her seem appealing’.[[317]](#footnote-317) There is frequently more to sexual attraction than this though; when we are sexually attracted to someone, in addition to wanting to have sex with them, we might want to speak intimately with them, to hug them, to hold their hand, to have them desire and care about us. Indeed, sexual attraction to someone is very often combined with the desire to be in a romantic, loving relationship with them.

In any case, if the reason for love is the value of the relationship, then we need to be clear about what constitutes the relationship and how various relationship-types differ, thus giving rise to different modes of love. Therefore, if sex is fundamental in distinguishing a romantic relationship from a friendship, we need to know what is so special about sex that gives it this role. We need to know whether sexual desire makes a relationship romantic or whether being in a romantic relationship creates a desire for sex, for this will tell us something about the value of the relationship and why we ought to love our romantic partners in the romantic mode.

**4.4) The difference between romantic love and friendship**

A gap in Kolodny’s account, which is related to all of the three I have outlined above, is that he does not fully distinguish between friendship and romantic love. He discusses them together as ‘attitude-dependent relationships’ which he describes as ‘ongoing patterns of concern’[[318]](#footnote-318) require the participants to view each other ‘as someone with equal standing’.[[319]](#footnote-319) Other philosophers also argue that friendship and romantic love can be analysed together,[[320]](#footnote-320) and, for the purposes of Kolodny’s discussion, distinguishing between them is not really necessary. However, it would be useful for my thesis to understand why it is that we choose some people to be our friends and some people to be our romantic lovers. This is not least because we tend to be monogamous with romantic love, but promiscuous with friendship. Kolodny does briefly mention that the difference between friendship and romantic love lies in the types of activities that are shared: ‘with friendships, the activities may involve spending leisure time together. With romantic relationships, the activities may involve, in addition, living together and expressing, in one way or another, sexual drives.’[[321]](#footnote-321) This does not adequately describe the difference though. Friends often live together and may ‘express their sexual drives’ to one another, without believing themselves to be in a romantic relationship. In addition to the difference in the types of activities that are shared, we expect romantic partners to have different attitudes and obligations towards each other than they would to their friends and perhaps to be more committed to each other. We also tend to think that some kind of exclusivity is necessary for romantic love. In the next chapter I will explore the ways in which friendship and romantic love differ.

**5) Conclusion**

With regard to why Jason loves Matilda and not Melissa or Matthew, two things mark her out from other people: her qualities and her relationship to Jason. I have shown that her qualities on their own are not enough to explain why he responds to her with love. Indeed, love makes sense only within a relationship that has a shared history. However, if Matilda is in a romantic relationship with Jason, it is because his qualities are such that she believes that being in a romantic relationship with him specifically will bring value to her life. Furthermore, their relationship gives her a reason, and the space, to seek out and value his qualities. The relationship view thus explains why the qualities of the beloved matter to the lover, including those qualities that she does not find objectively attractive. It also explains why love is relatively constant and tenacious, and why we care non-instrumentally for our romantic partners.

However, in order to understand whether a monogamous romantic relationship is worth pursuing, we need to fill in some gaps in the relationship view. Firstly, we need to know, not only why we love our partners, but also why love, and romantic love in particular, is important to us at all.[[322]](#footnote-322) Secondly, we need to know how the romantic relationship differs from friendship, and why it has particular value. These two questions will be addressed in the following chapter. Related to these questions are issues regarding the role and significance of sex and sexual exclusivity in romantic love. These issues will be considered in Chapters Five and Six.

**Chapter Five: What is the distinct value of a two-person romantic relationship?**

**1) Introduction**

In the previous three chapters I have established that romantic love is a kind of attitude towards a person, which involves non-instrumental concern for them as well as certain desires, such as the desire to be with them and to have one’s love returned. Furthermore, I have argued that this kind of love is ultimately grounded on the relationship shared with the beloved, though this relationship is made possible by their qualities. In the last chapter, I pointed out, however, that there were some gaps in Kolodny’s model of romantic love that need to be filled in order to understand the value, or lack of value, in monogamy. This was because Kolodny did not really consider the value of relationships in general, the role of sex or exclusivity (emotional and sexual) in romantic relationships, or the value of romantic relationships as distinct from friendship. In this chapter I will attempt to respond to two of the four gaps in Kolodny’s account I identified at the end of the last chapter, which will enable us to understand the importance of exclusivity in a romantic relationship. These are: (1) the value of the romantic relationship; and (2) the difference between romantic love and friendship. I will also consider why romantic relationships might typically be exclusive, though I am not going to discuss sexual exclusivity until Chapter Seven. The role and function of sex in the romantic relationship (another gap I identified) will be explored in Chapter Six. The current chapter fits into the overall project of the thesis in that my goal is to see what, if any, value is to be found in monogamous romantic love. As I have found that this kind of love depends on a particular kind of relationship, I need to understand the nature of such a relationship, and why it might be something we want in our lives in addition to friendship.

Therefore, in this chapter I will consider what makes romantic love different from other kinds of love. In particular, I will compare romantic relationships to friendship, as this is the kind of relationship most similar to romantic love. Furthermore, I will consider what makes romantic love important, or the kind of relationship one might want in one's life. There are differences between friendship and romantic love both in degree and in kind. Romantic love is, in some respects, an intense and important kind of friendship, and so we want it in our life for the same kinds of reasons that we want friendship: companionship, emotional support, fun, intellectual stimulation etc. However, there are also differences in kind between romantic love and friendship. The first of these is that romantic relationships involve sharing one’s identity in a unique way. The second is that romantic relationships tend to be much more exclusive than friendship and the dominant social norm is for them to be exclusive to two people. Friendship, on the other hand, though being somewhat exclusive, is seldom exclusive to two people and does not involve sharing identities in the same way. Therefore, I will suggest that the reason we might want romantic love in our lives in addition to friendship is precisely because we want an exclusive relationship with someone, or a very small number of people, with whom we share our life and identity.

Before proceeding I should offer some caveats. In this chapter I am going to discuss, primarily, the value of a two-person romantic relationship. This is because the focus of this thesis is monogamy and so I am examining specifically romantic relationships between two people. However, as will be clear throughout the chapter, most of what I say about the value of a romantic relationship could apply equally to a relationship between a small number of people. Therefore, I am not claiming that non-monogamous romantic love does not exist or is inferior to exclusive romantic love. For brevity and simplicity in the rest of this chapter I will use the terms ‘romantic love,’ or ‘romantic relationship,’ as short-hand for ‘two-person romantic love/relationships’. This is in no way meant to discount or discredit romantic relationships between more than two people.

In addition, I am discussing relatively long-term, committed love, not the initial infatuation stage romantic lovers go through. Further, I make no claims here about sexual exclusivity, as this will be the topic of Chapter Seven. Instead, my focus is on *relationship exclusivity.* If a relationship is exclusive then there is a commitment among members not to share a similar kind of relationship with anyone else without the permission of the other/s. It is thus very clear who is in it and who is not; each of its members has some control over who else enters it and, if the direction of the relationship is to be changed, it has to be done by the group as a whole. I will argue that such a relationship can give a focus to one’s life, as well has having some practical advantages. Moreover, part of its value lies in gaining a particular kind of recognition from one’s romantic partner that makes one feel that one is important. In a two-person romantic relationship one will feel *uniquely* important, and so a two-person relationship offers a distinct source of value (though this does not necessarily make it a more valuable kind of relationship than a non-monogamous one). Finally, I should point out that my analysis of the romantic relationship in this chapter is of an *ideal* romantic relationship. Relationships that do not accord with all of the features I describe may still be romantic relationships, just not ideal ones.

**2) Comparing romantic love with friendship**

In order to ascertain why romantic love is important to us, or the kind of relationship we want in our lives, we need to distinguish it from other kinds of relationship. We need to understand the reasons for having that particular kind of relationship, in addition to other kinds of relationship. Romantic love is clearly different to familial love in that we choose our romantic partners but we don’t choose our family. Romantic love is also more conditional than familial love; and attraction, particularly sexual attraction, is a significant feature of romantic love but not of familial love. By contrast, friendship shares many of the features of romantic love. They are both caring relationships which are chosen by the participants. However, as we have a concept of romantic love as separate from friendship, there must be important differences in the types of relationship, and in what we value about them. Comparing the two types of relationship can therefore be an exercise that can help us find out the distinctive value of romantic love. Some theorists have concluded that romantic love and friendship are fundamentally the same kinds of relationship. As I pointed out in the previous chapter, Kolodny implies that romantic love is the same kind of relationship as friendship. Jollimore also claims that friendship and romantic love are so similar that ‘we are justified in providing a single unified account that treats them as essentially the same phenomenon’. He suggests that ‘romantic love is simply a particular form of friendship, and that friendship at its best can be as passionate and committed as romantic love’.[[323]](#footnote-323) Helm also treats friendship and romantic love as the same kind of love. He calls this kind of love ‘personal love’ and suggests that it is ‘a part of the common core that is shared by the attitudes we have toward our friends and those we have toward our romantic partners.’[[324]](#footnote-324) Whilst I agree that friendship and romantic love are similar in many ways, I think that the nature of the relationships typically differ both in degree and in kind. It is these differences which lead us to value romantic relationships in a different way from how we value friendship, and thus to love some people romantically and some as friends. Furthermore, it is the distinct value we are seeking from a romantic relationship that makes it typically between two people. I will first look at the differences in degree and will then explore the differences in kind.

**2.1) Romantic love as different from friendship in degree**

There are certainly good reasons for thinking that romantic love differs from friendship in degree. If this were the only difference, it would make romantic love just a very intense and intimate form of friendship. Friendship shares many of the features of romantic love. It is selective and conditional: friends choose one another, and may end the relationship if one friend changes their personality, values, interests, if they treat the other badly. On the other hand, like romantic love, friendship is tenacious: good friends are usually loyal and committed to maintaining the friendship and are willing to put up with misdemeanours from the other friend and some (negative) changes in personality or lifestyle. Loyalty is generally considered to be a characteristic of both a good friend and a good lover.[[325]](#footnote-325) Furthermore, friendship, like romantic love, is a reciprocal relationship, ideally shared between people who consider themselves equals. Both friendship and romantic love involve caring for each other’s wellbeing, and taking pleasure in each other’s company. Friendship also involves a degree of exclusivity and commitment, as we can have only a limited number of friends and we treat our friends differently from those with whom we are not friends. We also have certain obligations towards our friends, such as the obligation to support them in times of need. In addition, sometimes our love for our friends can feel out of our control, and we might be inexplicably drawn towards certain friendships, just as we are with romantic love. On the other hand, we tend to seek out friends with certain characteristics, just as we tend to form romantic relationships with similar types of people. Finally, close friendship, like romantic love, involves sharing intimate information with one another, and can involve physical and sexual intimacy.

In addition, many lovers consider themselves to be best friends, and romantic relationships often begin as friendships. Some friends might find that when they reach a certain level of intimacy, they think it is appropriate to change their relationship to a romantic one. Moreover, we tend to want our romantic lovers to treat us in a similar way to how they treat their friends, but we want them to give us much greater significance. We expect them to spend more time with us, be more interested in our problems, be more physically and emotionally intimate with us, and involve us in their life decisions to a greater extent than they do with their friends.

**2.2) Why romantic love and friendship do not differ only by matter of degree**

Nevertheless, although romantic lovers are often friends, and friendship and romantic love share many features, romantic lovers do not share the same *kind* of relationship as best friends. Although romantic lovers can be friends,[[326]](#footnote-326) friends can’t be romantic lovers without fundamentally changing the nature of their relationship. Friendship comes in degrees, whereas, in general, you are either in a romantic relationship with someone or you are not. We do not simply pick our closest friend to be our romantic lover, and many people have a best friend *and* a romantic partner. This suggests that we put the relationships in different categories. There is not a linear scale of intimacy upon which once a friend reaches a certain point they become your romantic partner. This means that there must be a difference in kind, not only of degree, between the relationships. Indeed, we usually consider it very important to mark out our romantic relationships as distinct from our friendships. We do this in many ways; the most obvious is perhaps by the names we give our relationships. For example, Sarah is Jason’s *friend, but* Matilda is his *partner.* People getting into a romantic relationship are often very concerned to know when they are ‘together’. It is important for us to know when we are in a romantic relationship, as this relationship generates rights and obligations not shared by friends. These rights and obligations are significant, and are present not only within the relationship, but also towards third parties. For example, if Jason is in a romantic relationship with Matilda, he has the right to have people respect his need for time alone with her and perhaps the obligation to be polite to her mother. We sometimes set a particular date to mark the beginning of the romantic relationship, and anniversaries are often considered important in romantic relationships, but they seldom are for friendships. Indeed, it is rare that we know, or care about, the dates our friendships began and friends do not usually ‘break up’ in the same way that romantic partners do. Furthermore, romantic love is something that can be formalised in a marriage contract, whereas friendship cannot.[[327]](#footnote-327) Thus, romantic love has much sharper boundaries than friendship.

Another way we distinguish between romantic relationships and friendships is through physical intimacy. Although many people are physically intimate with both friends and lovers, they are not intimate in the same way. This is culturally variable, but in British culture the differences may include, for example, kissing a friend on the cheek but a lover on the lips, and (female) friends sometimes link arms with each other when walking around but hold hands only with their lovers. If a person is in a romantic relationship, they will usually reserve sexual intimacy for that relationship. Such physical displays of intimacy do not seem to be markers only of a difference in degree of closeness: if Clara and John have been close friends for twenty years and Clara has been with her girlfriend, Amina, for two months, Clara is likely to be far closer to John than to Amina. Nonetheless, Clara might still kiss Amina on the lips but John on the cheek, and hold hands with Amina but not with John, in part, as indications of the different kinds of relationships, and different kinds of intimacy, they share. Indeed, it would probably be inappropriate for Clara to kiss John on the lips, or to try and hold his hand when they went out, even though they are very close friends, because it would seem to be failing to recognise the particular type of relationship they share.

Kolodny seems to imply that sex is the crucial difference between friendship and romantic love, arguing that loss of sexual attraction might be a reason to change the relationship from a romantic one to a friendship: ‘to the extent that a relationship that was once romantic is no longer structured around the expression of sexual drives, for example, it may make more sense to view it simply as a friendship.’[[328]](#footnote-328) Sex does seem to be almost essential to romantic love: unless there are special circumstances,[[329]](#footnote-329) we tend to assume that we should have sex with our romantic partner at least at some point in our relationship. However, sex by itself is not sufficient to distinguish between friendship and romantic love: there are best friends who have sex but do not conceive of themselves as romantic lovers. Further, sometimes people learn to find the person they love romantically sexually attractive, or, in other words, they find them sexually attractive *because* they love them romantically, rather than romantic love being a product of their sexual attraction. In addition, asexual people, and people who are physically unable to have sex might still differentiate between their romantic partner and their friends, despite not being able to use sexual attraction and/or sexual activity as a way to do this. Finally, couples who are no longer sexually attracted to one another, or no longer desire sex for other reasons, might still feel that they love each other romantically, and that their relationship is romantic rather than a friendship. Furthermore, they probably do not consider their relationship to be a romantic one only because they used to have sex. This does not mean that we cannot regard sex as *a* distinguishing factor of romantic love, but that it cannot be held as *the* distinguishing factor. I will discuss the relationship between love and sex in detail in the next chapter.

**3) Romantic love as different in kind from friendship**

I suggest that – in addition to sex – there are two key differences in kind between romantic love and friendship. The first is that romantic love involves sharing one’s life and identity with another in a different way from friendship. The second is that romantic love is a far more exclusive relationship, typically being exclusive to two people, whereas friendship is much more flexible in its degree of exclusivity. These two differences are closely related: it is partly because you can only have *one,* or some very small number of, romantic lover(s) that they become such a big part of your life and identity, and one of the reasons we want to share our life and identity with our romantic lovers is that we only have one (or some very small number) of them. In this section, I am first going to consider some shared identity accounts of romantic love and will try to work out what exactly it could mean to ‘share an identity’. Before doing this, I want first to consider what we might understand by ‘identity’ because this term is ambiguous. Firstly, it includes simply what individuates you, marking you out from others. However, we usually mean more to it than this, tending to see it as both the way you see yourself and the way that others see you. Your identity includes your character, values, priorities and goals; it provides a narrative to your life, giving you, and others around you, a way to make sense of it and see it as coherent. A shared identity, therefore, needs to involve both sharing the way that you see yourself and sharing the way that you appear to the outside world. I’ll argue that there is value in sharing an identity, and will respond to some objections to this account. In Section 6 I’ll look at the value of exclusivity in order to ascertain why we might want an exclusive love relationship in our life.

**3.1) Romantic love and shared identity: some accounts**

Perhaps the most famous shared identity account of love appears in Plato’s Aristophanic myth in *The Symposium.* Here, Aristophanes tries to explain romantic love by telling a story about how once upon a time people had doubled bodies, with two heads, four arms, four legs and so on. Zeus, in a bid to weaken them, cut them in half, leaving them to search the earth for their ‘lost half’. Those who found their other half wanted to be welded together and never apart again. Love is this feeling of wholeness, says Plato.[[330]](#footnote-330) Thus, the Aristophanic account of romantic love describes it as merging together, submerging your individual identity into the one you now share with your partner. This sentiment is expressed in some of the widely-used metaphorical expressions lovers use to describe their feelings, such as calling each other ‘my other half’ or saying, ‘you complete me,’ or, after relationship break-ups, ‘I feel like part of me is missing’ or ‘I’m half the man I used to be with you’.

The notion of a shared identity also appears in Hegel, though he does not think that the merger implies a total loss of individuality. In a set of lectures from 1824/5, as well as in the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel argues that love has two moments. In the first, I realise that ‘in love I don’t want to be this independent person by myself’. In the second moment:

‘I maintain and preserve myself in this negation, because I gain myself in another person. [...] This means that each person has in the other the consciousness of the other and of the self, this unity.’

Thus, in order to love someone romantically one must accept that one is no longer an independent person, but this is not restrictive, because through love one’s consciousness expands. Robert Williams calls this unity ‘a corporate person’ which involves ‘a liberation from abstract, isolated selfhood and the creation of genuine substantial independence’.[[331]](#footnote-331) One sees oneself not only through one’s own eyes, but also through the eyes of one’s lover, and vice versa. This provides us with an important sense of recognition that we matter to the world.

‘In [my beloved] I have the intuition, the consciousness, that I count for something, in her I have worth and validity. But it is not only I who counts, she also counts for me. This means that each person has in the other the consciousness of the other and of the self, this unity. Goethe says quite correctly that one is only conscious of oneself in others.’ [[332]](#footnote-332)

Thus, what we have is not so much the surrender of one’s independence, but rather the gaining of a more substantial kind of self-awareness and self-esteem, both of which can lead to a more important kind of independence. The lovers must remain, in some sense, separate, if they are to have the consciousness of the other within themselves. Thus, in love, according to Hegel, you remain a separate person but expand yourself to include your beloved’s consciousness within you.

Like Aristophanes, Robert Solomon argues that ‘the dominant conceptual ingredient in romantic love [...] is just this urge for shared identity, a kind of ontological dependency.’[[333]](#footnote-333) What is distinctive about romantic love is that we want to share ourselves with another. However, his account also has elements of Hegel’s in it. Solomon defines ‘ontological dependency’ as ‘a sense of presence, “always in mind,” defining one’s sense of self to one’s self,’[[334]](#footnote-334) which sounds similar to Hegel’s view that ‘each person has in the other the consciousness of the other and of the self’. In a later paper, Solomon claims that ‘lovers and spouses re-conceive of themselves and redraw the boundaries of their identity and their interests with and through the other person.’[[335]](#footnote-335) In order to do this, the lovers must retain some separateness or they would not be able to redraw their boundaries with the other. Thus, similar to Hegel, rather than the lovers merging together and losing their individuality, they have both expanded themselves to incorporate the other, enlarging or adding to their identity, while keeping some separateness:

‘the ultimate reasons for love are concerned with the fact that we now share our *selves*, that my life is no longer imaginable without you, that there is a sense in which it is by way of your eyes and ears that I see and hear, in terms of your tastes and preferences that I gauge my own. That is love, and that is the ultimate reason for love.’[[336]](#footnote-336)

Solomon does not mind that he seems to be saying that love is a reason for itself, because, as I described in the previous chapter, once love has taken root, it does provide a reason to keep loving.

Nozick also argues that the lovers gain an *additional* joint identity[[337]](#footnote-337). His central claim is that ‘romantic love is wanting to form a *‘we’* with a particular person’; this *‘we’* is a new, additional identity to the one you have already.[[338]](#footnote-338) He proposes that we might diagram lovers ‘as two figures with the boundary line between them erased where they come together,’[[339]](#footnote-339) whereas the diagram of friendship would be ‘two circles that overlap’.[[340]](#footnote-340) This implies that friends retain their separate identities and characters, but share things and allow their lives to come into contact. Romantic lovers, on the other hand, remain separate figures but blur together; with love involving ‘pooling your well-being and your autonomy’.[[341]](#footnote-341) This does seem to fit with our experience of relationships: we can have many friends yet remain, in some sense, an individual, but as soon as we begin a romantic relationship our lives no longer belong to us only. We have certain claims on our romantic partner that we do not have on our friends, such as the claim to be included in life decisions. Nozick suggests that the reason we don’t seek to ‘trade up,’ or end relationships, very willingly is that to do so ‘would then be a willingness to destroy yourself in the form of your own extended self.’[[342]](#footnote-342) For him, ‘the idea that this is the only person for you becomes true after the ‘we’ is formed’.[[343]](#footnote-343) This is because, once the shared identity has been created, it needs both partners in order to exist.

The idea of a shared identity is difficult to articulate. It is clear that the lovers don’t literally merge together and become one but also that we share our identities all the time so it is not a distinctive feature of romantic love only. One might thus object to the notion of a shared identity as a way of distinguishing romantic love from friendship by saying that it is too weak or too strong. It might be too weak, and thus fail to differentiate romantic love from other types of relationship because we share our identity with others all the time. For example, I work as a unit and share an identity to some extent with my family, my friends and my work colleagues. On the other hand, the shared identity account may be too strong; the idea of merging together is somewhat metaphorical, and may not actually be possible or desirable. In what follows, I will address each of these kinds of objection, which should help us to become a little clearer about the way in which romantic lovers do share an identity. I’ll suggest that the main difference lies in the commitment romantic lovers make to share a life. Finally, I’ll look at some other objections the idea of a shared identity.

**3.2) The shared identity account as too weak?**

An initial response to this view might be that we share an identity with people all the time and therefore, a shared identity is not the defining feature of romantic love. For example, we share our identity with our family, our friends, our work colleagues, associations of which we are a part, and sports teams in which we play. In this section I’ll look first at family, then at more formalised social groups, such as associations, and then at friendship. I will argue that, although we do share our identity in many ways, the shared identity of romantic lovers is fundamentally different from that of other groups.

**3.2.1) The shared identity of family members**

When we think about our identity, what often comes to mind is the family of which we are a part. We might find it very difficult to imagine ourselves as separate from our family, and the death of a close family member can feel like part of you has died too. Families often make plans together, and expect to spend a significant proportion of time together. They might also come to share a similar evaluative perspective on the world and want others to see them as a family unit. The shared identity of family members is thus similar to the shared identity of romantic lovers in many ways.

Nonetheless, the shared identity we have with our family members means something very different to us than the shared identity we have with our romantic partners. This is because we have it in large part due to an inescapable fact about ourselves; which is usually whom we are raised by.[[344]](#footnote-344) We do not choose our family and we may share no values, interests or goals with them. Indeed, we might not even like or respect them very much, and do our best to spend as little time with them as possible. Furthermore, as our family has not chosen us, on the basis of our character, to be their family, their desire to share an identity with us does not provide us with the same validation as romantic love. I will elaborate on this point later on. Finally, we do not typically want to share our whole lives with our families. We tend to want to share only aspects of our lives, and at only certain time periods. For example, at least in British culture, parents do not typically desire or assume that their children will live with them for the whole of their lives. Even if we get on well with our parents, once we enter adulthood we might not spend much time with them or be emotionally close to them. We might feel uncomfortable discussing certain issues or doing certain things with our family whereas romantic lovers are, ideally, very comfortable with each other in most circumstances and conversations. Thus, the shared identity of family members is less pervasive and substantial than that of romantic lovers.

**3.2.2) The shared identity of formal social groups**

When you join or form a formal social group, such as an association or political party, you do so with the intention of becoming part of a community, sharing your ideas and ultimately sharing your identity in some respect. You give up some of your freedom to do as you please for the good of the group. Your perception of yourself changes upon becoming a member of the group, and you may have to change some of the ways you think and behave. You become a ‘we,’ sharing ends, and can say things such as ‘*we* the Green Party believe X and want Y’. Furthermore, you share your public identity to some extent with your group. People come to see you as ‘Z, a member of the Green Party’. A commitment to shared values, interests or goals is usually the reason for joining and founding such associations. For example, you may form a society to allow people to pursue their interest in stamp collecting or to promote animal welfare.

A crucial difference between the shared identity of these kinds of groups and romantic relationships is that, in general, as long as someone shares the values, interests and goals of the group, they may join.[[345]](#footnote-345) Unless they are very difficult to work with, their individual character is not that important as they are not chosen to be part of the group because of their character as a whole. The goal of the group is the most important thing. Even when people form associations merely to promote their shared welfare, such as community welfare associations, they do not usually do it out of love for particular individuals, but rather for the good of the group as a whole. The formal social group is therefore instrumental to an end, rather than being an end in itself. When groups are formed that are ends in themselves, (i.e. when people form a group just because they like each other and want to spend time together, provide each other with mutual support etc.), they are really friendship groups. In formal social groups you are not cared for non-instrumentally. If the group do care about each other in this way then they will be friends as well as members of the group. Indeed, a key difference between romantic relationships and formal social groups is that, if you leave a formal social group, it will continue to exist and may not even change that much. The group may have a completely new set of members every couple of years but continue to have the same values and goals. Conversely, a romantic relationship will cease to exist if one or both members leave. Even in polyamorous relationships, between say, three or four people, the relationship will be fundamentally different if one member leaves.

Furthermore, you typically share only aspects of yourself with formal social groups, and indeed the other members may know little about you as a person. On the other hand, in an ideal romantic relationship you share almost the whole of yourself with your romantic lover; they tend to know a great deal about you. In addition, you do not (ideally) value being in *a* relationship over being in a relationship *with them*. On the contrary, you might value being a member of the Green Party regardless of who else is in the party; if you value being part of a group only because of its individual members, your relationship with them would be more akin to friendship. The goal of sharing your life and identity is worthwhile only because of the individuality of your partner. Therefore, the reasons for sharing your identity with a formal social group are different to the reasons for sharing your identity with a romantic partner, and the shared identity of group members has a different nature to that of romantic lovers.

**3.2.3) The shared identity of friends**

As I have suggested, for many reasons (intimate) friendship is the type of relationship that is most similar to romantic love. Moreover, we share an identity, to some extent, with our friends and we choose to do this because of the character of our friends; the relationship is valuable in itself, not just as a means of achieving another goal. People form ‘friendship groups’, or pairs of best friends, with whom they might ask, ‘what shall *we* do this weekend?’ They might come to share the values and desires of their friends, even coming to dress and speak like them, and when they think about whom they are, their friendship group might be a very important component. The shared identity of friends is closer in kind to the shared identity of romantic lovers than the shared identity of family members or formal social group members.

However, the shared identity of romantic lovers is more substantial, more well-defined and more publicly acknowledged than the less consistent, weaker form of shared identity shared between friends. Friends don’t commit to sharing their lives or share as much of their lives as romantic lovers do; they don’t tend to introduce themselves to people as being ‘together’ or insist that they both meet each other’s parents. The shared identity of friends is more prone to being dismantled, less stable, less all-encompassing, and most people do not think that the shared identity of friends ought to be given legal protection through the institution of marriage. Some of the reasons for this are that we have many friends, and friends do not usually make commitments to share their lives. This is significant, as it suggests that when friends do share their lives they do so more out of convenience than because it seems intrinsic to the nature of friendship. For romantic lovers, on the other hand, committing to sharing a life seems to be a condition of being in such a relationship. Friendships, even close friendships, often fizzle out or become less close as they become less convenient, whereas romantic lovers will make a lot of effort to retain their sense of unity, despite changes in circumstances. For example, if Matilda had to move abroad for work, it would be unsurprising if Jason moved with her, even if this meant he had to make sacrifices in other areas of his life. By contrast, it would seem rather strange for Jason’s friend, Michael, to move with Jason, solely for the reason that he wanted to be near him. We would instead expect him to just spend more time with other friends, or make a new friend, and accept that he and Jason will no longer be as close as they were. Indeed, another difference between friendship and romantic love is that friendships can persist despite big gaps in contact. Two people may still consider themselves to be friends if they have not spoken for a year. The same is not true of romantic lovers unless external factors have prevented them from contacting each other, such as if one has been imprisoned in a foreign country.

I conclude this section with the observation that whilst shared identity *per se* is not a distinguishing feature of romantic love, the specific character of the shared identity of romantic lovers is. Thus, the shared identity account of love is not too weak, but it does need to be more specific about how romantic lovers share their identity. After briefly considering the objection that the shared identity account is too strong, I will move on to explaining in greater detail the ways in which I think romantic lovers share an identity.

**3.3) The shared identity account as too strong?**

The second way we might object to the shared identity accounts of love is by saying that they are too strong, that they provide an unattainable ideal of romantic love that does not match reality. Lovers remain separate individuals, and retaining this separateness is often very important to lovers, some of whom would not like the idea that being in love meant that they had to reconceive of themselves. Indeed, part of what we find interesting and important about intimate relationships is precisely that the person with whom we share the relationship is a separate person whom we can come to know. As I have argued in previous chapters, part of the value of romantic love derives from the continued choice of the lover to love the beloved. She cannot make this choice unless she is a separate person. The Platonic image of the lovers, as ‘two halves,’ suggests that people cannot be whole without romantic love, which is obviously not true. We are ‘whole people’ when we are alone; indeed an argument could be made that we are more ‘whole’ when we are *not* sharing our identity with a romantic partner. Solomon’s notion of ‘ontological dependency’ also seems rather too strong, implying that the lovers cannot exist without one another. Being ‘ontologically dependent’ on someone else can be dangerous, especially if they are not as committed or dependent on you. This is not to say that the shared identity accounts are wrong but rather that we need to be careful not to be too extreme in our characterisation of the shared identity. In what follows I will try to articulate what a shared identity might actually look like in practical terms.

**3.4) Sharing a life**

In this section, I argue that romantic lovers share a life in a unique way, and that this is what causes them to share their identities. I will use friendship in particular against which to compare romantic love, as the shared identities of friends are most similar to those of romantic lovers. Friends also share their lives, to an extent, but the way they do so is not generally due to commitment to sharing their lives because sharing a life is not part of what friendship means. In addition, they typically share less of their lives than romantic lovers do. In order to elucidate the difference between the way friends and romantic lovers share their lives, I will use Margaret Gilbert’s discussion of what it means to go for a walk together in her paper: ‘Walking Together: A Paradigmatic Social Phenomenon’, wherein she tries to understand how people can make decisions and act together. She contrasts going for a walk together with a situation in which two people walk side by side, but are not actually walking *together*. She argues that the crucial difference is that when two people walk together ‘each party has made it clear to the other that he is willing to *join forces* with the other in accepting the goal that they walk in one another’s company,’ or, in other words, ‘each of the parties must express willingness to constitute with the other a *plural subject of the goal* that they walk in one another’s company.’[[346]](#footnote-346) By contrast, two people walking side by side do not constitute a couple walking together, even if they both *want* to walk side by side, and thus have a shared goal, and even if they tell each other that this is what they want, thus communicating their shared intentions. Finally, they are not walking together, even if they tell each other that they will do whatever they can to achieve their goal of continuing to walk side by side, for instance that they will call out to the other one if she draws ahead to gain her attention.[[347]](#footnote-347) This might initially seem unintuitive, but the crucial thing is not whether we would apply the term ‘walking together’ to this couple, but rather what obligations they have to each other. Gilbert argues that they are not obligated to continue to walk together because, even though their goals are the same as each other’s, they are goals that they developed *independently from one another*, rather than goals that were developed *interdependently*. Thus, they are not duty-bound to continue walking together, and neither has the right to rebuke the other walker if she goes off on a different path or walks at a different pace. They are merely two people who want to do the same thing at the same time; they have not come to make the decision to do so together, and so do not form a ‘plural subject’ of their walk.

I think Gilbert’s discussion of the phenomenon of going for a walk together can help us to explore a central difference between romantic love and friendship. The couple walking together can be compared to a romantic couple, whereas the couple walking side by side are more like friends, though the analogy is not entirely accurate, as I will explain. When two people are in a (serious, long-term) romantic relationship they express a desire to become a plural subject of the goal to share a life together, in a similar way to how the couple who decide to go on a walk together express a desire to become a plural subject of the goal to go for a walk together. As Gilbert points out, people on a walk together should realise that they have certain rights and obligations. For example, each has the obligation not to draw ahead and the right to rebuke the other person if they do walk ahead.[[348]](#footnote-348) On the other hand, the couple walking side by side, but not on a walk together, do not have such rights and obligations. Either is within their rights to walk at whatever pace they fancy. Further, if you go for a walk together, you ought to not just go off on your own path, leaving the other behind, nor can you just go home when you please without conversing with your walking partner. Thus, in acting together, you lose some of your independence; you can no longer do exactly what you want. However, your partner also loses some of their independence so the exchange is fair, and in exchange for both of your sacrifices, you gain the rewards that walking *with* someone brings.

Analogously, getting into a romantic relationship involves a commitment to give up some of your independence in exchange for some of your partner’s, and the enhancement to one’s life that sharing it brings (I will discuss the value of sharing one’s life later on). This commitment is implicit and difficult *not* to make if you are in a romantic relationship. As Stan van Hooft points out ‘the declaration “I love you”, when honestly made, is either the making of this commitment or the announcement that one discovers oneself with it’. This is because romantic love ‘involves altering the order of practical priorities in one’s life rather than just having an emotion’.[[349]](#footnote-349) You can no longer do exactly what you like anymore without conversing with your partner on important matters at least. For example, if you want to go travelling for a year, you have an obligation to speak with your partner before booking your tickets. This is because this decision will have a significant impact on them as a plural subject of your life. Also, you have an obligation not to just leave the relationship when you feel like it, without at the very least explaining your reasons to your partner (unless there are special circumstances, such as that your partner has badly mistreated you). In some relationships, the commitment to sharing a life will be stronger and partners will, for example, not make plans for the weekend without first conversing with their partner. In addition, you have the right to expect your partner to share her life with you, and to be aggrieved if she does not share enough of it with you. As the couple walking together begin to think as a ‘we’ with regard to their walk, asking questions such as ‘shall *we* go this way?’ the romantic couple begin to think as a ‘we’ with regard to key life decisions, such as ‘shall *we* move house?’ or ‘will this be good for *us*?*’*

Friends, on the other hand, might be compared to the couple walking side by side, both sharing an intention to continue walking side by side, wanting to do so, but not actually making a shared decision to walk together. The walkers drift into the walk and may drift out of it when it is no longer convenient in an analogous way to the way that people drift in and out of friendships often at least partly as a result of convenience. They might care about each other and share an intention to continue to be friends and look out for each other, but are usually less explicit and indeed, less clear in their own minds, about what commitments and obligations they have towards one another. They are under less pressure to continue their relationship as it currently is, and may go off for a while, spending most of their time elsewhere or ‘walking with someone else’, and then return to the friendship. Of course, the analogy with Gilbert’s couple walking side by side but not together is not quite right – a good friend will show loyalty and a degree of commitment to their friendship. Friends pay attention to each other and won’t just totally abandon each other without warning. Nonetheless, if I want to go travelling for a year, I will probably tell my friends, but I won’t give them any say in the matter. I might ask their advice but it will be in the context of ‘what should *I* do?’ rather than ‘what should *we* do?’ I would find it unreasonable of them to expect me to invite them or to stay with them, as our relationship does not give me an obligation to include them in my life-plans. We can make an analogy here with the walkers who are not walking together. It would be kind for each to tell the other that she is leaving, but she need not involve him in her decision to leave, and he has no right to rebuke her for leaving without conversing with him.

It is important to point out that romantic lovers do not want to form a ‘we’ merely out of convenience. Just as two people walking together do not (ideally) want to walk together just so that they have someone there to pick them up if they fall over, lovers do not want to share a life purely because it will make their lives easier. Their shared life has instrumental value only insofar as it promotes and represents their mutual care and concern. It promotes their love by making them better able to care for one another, and it represents their care by displaying their devotion to each other. Moreover, lovers share their lives simply because sharing a life has intrinsic value, being integral to romantic love.[[350]](#footnote-350) Our concept of a romantic relationship includes a shared life, and thus to want to be in a romantic relationship with someone means to desire to share a life with them. The lovers want to create their own world, a shared world which belongs to them only. This shared world is described eloquently in a newspaper article about the writer, Julian Barnes’ feelings after the death of his wife:

‘Above all, he misses what the two created between them, a tapestry of a life that can never be replicated. "The loss of shared vocabulary, of tropes, teases, short cuts… amatory footnotes… all those obscure references rich in memory but valueless if explained to an outsider."’[[351]](#footnote-351)

Andrea Westlund argues that the commitment to a shared life is more important ‘than the precise content of the ends and interests a couple comes to share.’[[352]](#footnote-352) This is because sharing reasons for actions, and being committed to sharing reasons, expresses loving concern.[[353]](#footnote-353) Lovers differ from bargainers in that they are not trying to get the agreement of the other purely to secure the best possible outcome for themselves. Instead, they want the best possible outcome for both of them, plural.[[354]](#footnote-354) Thus, they might also prefer to try to share a life together that may involve one or both of them making sacrifices in other areas of their lives, than have a more successful career or social life, for example, but be apart from one another. This is not to say that lovers ought to abandon success in all other aspects of their life for their relationship if it calls for it. Nonetheless, the good of their relationship, which includes a shared life, provides them with significant *reasons* to do or not do certain things. We are thus usually happy to make sacrifices in some areas of our individual lives for the good of a shared life. Returning to the walking analogy, the walkers might decide that walking together is more important to them than where they walk. Therefore, they will be willing to make sacrifices regarding the exact details of their walk, as long as they can walk together.

Romantic lovers make efforts to represent their commitment to sharing a life and identity to one another, and to the outside world. For example, romantic lovers might spend a lot of time together, introduce each other to their respective families and friends, attend social events together (and arrive and leave together), go on holiday together, and sleep, eat and live together. If they use social media, they might also use that as a way to convey to others that they are in a relationship. If they are married, they might choose to wear a wedding ring to symbolise to themselves and others that they have made a commitment to share their life with someone. It is significant that romantic lovers want their shared life and identity to be publicly recognised, and that we feel it is appropriate to acknowledge their togetherness. As we tend to present ourselves to the world in a way that reflects the way we feel about ourselves, the desire to present yourself as someone who is ‘in a relationship’ shows that a romantic relationship changes the way you see yourself. Those outside of the relationship will show that they recognise the unity of the lovers by doing such things as inviting them together to events, letting them sit next to one another in restaurants, and sending them joint Christmas cards. Failure to acknowledge the togetherness of the lovers is considered disrespectful, almost as disrespectful as failing to recognise someone’s personhood. They have not recognised the new, additional, identity that the lovers have taken on. Moreover, a lack of desire or willingness to present oneself as being in a romantic relationship can be seen as a sign that they are not really in love.

Therefore, lovers share their identities by reconstructing their priorities, values and goals in light of those of each other; the narrative of their lives comes to include each other. In addition, they change the way that they appear to others so that they now appear as a person who shares part of their identity with another.

**3.5) Hegel’s ‘first and second moment’ of love**

I think our discussion of the shared identity of lovers can help us to understand what Hegel means by his two moments of love. If I am right, that in order to be in a romantic relationship you have to be willing to share your life and identity, we can see how Hegel’s first moment of love – ‘I don’t want to be this independent person by myself’ – is a necessary precondition for being in a romantic relationship. You accept that you can no longer make all of your decisions on your own as you can when you have only friendship relationships. In that sense, the desire to be in a romantic relationship shares a feature of the desire to have children, in that both relationships will entail a loss of independence on your behalf. However, Hegel’s second moment is distinctive of romantic love: ‘I maintain and preserve myself in this negation, because I gain myself in another person [...] This means that each person has in the other the consciousness of the other and of the self, this unity.’[[355]](#footnote-355) The reason we want a relationship which takes away some of our independence is because we ‘gain ourselves in another person’. This phrase is quite ambiguous. Christopher Bennett suggests that it could represent the kind of recognition we get through love. Through seeing yourself reflected in another’s eyes you experience your life as being real and important, and therefore, you ‘gain yourself’.[[356]](#footnote-356) We might say that we gain a sort of reflection of ourselves. In addition, we might experience this ‘second moment’ as a kind of discovery and expansion of the self. Through sharing an intimate romantic relationship with someone, I discover things about myself through seeing myself through their eyes, and also develop a new side of my identity as part of a ‘we’.[[357]](#footnote-357) When we are in love we sometimes not only love our beloved, but also the version of ourselves that we are when we are with them. Thus, when a relationship ends we lose not only our beloved, but also that version of ourselves whom we loved. We perhaps love this version of ourselves so much because it is a self that we see through the eyes of someone who thinks us worthy of intense attention and exclusive love. It might also be because we think of this self as our ‘true self’. As Solomon argues: ‘when we talk about “the real self” or “being true to ourselves,” what we often mean is being true to the image of ourselves that we share with those we love most’ and ‘the self we would like to think of as most real is the self that emerges in intimacy’.[[358]](#footnote-358) As romantic love typically involves a kind of intimacy not shared by other sorts of relationship, the side of yourself expressed in romantic love is unlikely to be expressed elsewhere.

**3.6) Objections to the idea of shared identity**

In this section I want to discuss three of the worries philosophers have had with shared identity accounts of romantic love. The first is that a shared identity entails that the lovers cannot care for each other non-instrumentally. Secondly, if the lovers form a new joint identity they do not really change in any profound way. The third objection is that often the lovers will not share an identity equally and one partner will therefore lose some of their autonomy while the other gains greater autonomy. Further, women are more likely to lose out in this way.

Alan Soble argues that union accounts of love leave no room for autonomy.[[359]](#footnote-359) If we take ‘autonomy’ to mean being independent and having control over your own life, then, sharing your identity with someone else will diminish it since you will no longer be in complete control of who you are. Moreover, if the lovers fully share an identity, they are unable to care for one another non-instrumentally. This is because, ‘for x to sacrifice his good for the good of y requires that their interests are disjoint enough so that x’s good does not always fare as y fares.’[[360]](#footnote-360) However, if x and y have a shared identity in the form of xy, neither can promote the other’s well-being; they can only promote the well-being of the joint xy. This means that the promotion of their well-being stems from self-interest rather than robust concern, and thus it does not seem that they really care about each other at all.[[361]](#footnote-361) If Jason and Matilda merge together so that they share all aspects of their identity, then Matilda cannot, for example, sacrifice her yearly skiing trip to go on a city break with him, since as they are one unit, they will both have the same desires about where to go on holiday.

Soble’s criticisms of the shared identity accounts are serious. If he is right, then it is not possible to share your identity with someone *and* be an autonomous agent. Furthermore, it is not possible to care for their well-being, which makes sharing your identity with someone at odds with loving them, rather than being integral to it. Nevertheless, his objections apply only to cases where the lovers no longer have individual identities and thus rely on a rather extreme, and unrealistic, shared identity account, whereby the lovers literally become one entity. As Marilyn Friedman points out, ‘lovers usually, if not always, retain substantial individuality and separate selfhood.’[[362]](#footnote-362) The ideal of romantic love is to share a life and an identity; but this does not entail relinquishing your individuality. Nozick’s construal of the ‘we’ as an *additional* identity to the one you have already, rather than as an identity which replaces your own, describes the phenomenology of love more accurately than the idea that we abandon individual selfhood. Indeed, it is impossible and undesirable to completely share an identity. Our inner worlds necessarily belong to us only, and there are always going to be differences in values, interests, perspectives and so on between lovers. Furthermore, a relationship in which lovers share their identity *too much* is not ideal. Totally submerging oneself into a shared identity can be stifling and self-destructive, not least because romantic relationships can end. In addition, part of what attracts us to romantic love is the idea of really getting to know and understand another person. This is, in part, so that we can share a life with them more effectively, and so that we can care for them better, but it is also because we find value in learning about another person. It is not possible to really get to know someone if that person does not have their own separate identity, since they would have nothing to reveal.

However, if we concede that the lovers retain separate identities, we might question whether they actually share their identities in any meaningful way at all. Noël Merino suggests that if the lovers continue to possess individual identities but form an additional joint identity, then love does not really change the individual. However, proponents of the shared identity account argue that love alters the lovers profoundly, largely because of their shared identity. Merino uses the analogies of a tree becoming part of a forest and a person becoming a member of a political party to show how becoming part of a bigger group does not profoundly alter the individual. This is because only their relational, and thus not their intrinsic, properties have changed. The tree in itself is exactly the same whether it is in a forest or a lone tree in a field. However, the lone tree does not have the relational property of ‘being part of a forest’. Merino suggests that ‘there is no explanation for why the lovers would care about having an additional identity with any particular person, since their initial identity is meant to remain unchanged.’[[363]](#footnote-363) In response to Merino, I argue that when a person becomes part of a bigger group, this can, and often does, profoundly alter them. This is because people’s relational properties affect the way that they see themselves and experience the world, as well as the way that others see them. Indeed, sometimes if becoming part of a group does not change the individual, this might be a sign that the individual has not fully engaged with the group. For example, becoming a committed member of a political party might lead to a change in the way you spend some of your time, a change in your circle of friends, and, perhaps most importantly, a change in your attitudes, values and perspectives. If it involves these changes it will change the way that you see yourself, and the way that others see you. Thus, if one fully engages with a romantic relationship, by allowing their lover to become a big part of their life, the relationship will undoubtedly make a significant difference to their life and sense of identity. As I described earlier, becoming part a ‘corporate person’, through being committed to sharing your life and identity with another, changes the way that you are publicly perceived, as well as the way you view yourself and the world. Your identity remains separate from your lover’s, but incorporates their identity within it, just as you might incorporate a political party within your identity. In addition, by becoming part of a ‘we’ you gain new rights and obligations which will undoubtedly change your life significantly.

The final problem with shared identity accounts of love I’ll discuss here is a practical one rooted in a worry about gender inequality. Friedman notes that ‘romantic mergers’, as she calls them, can sometimes promote autonomy,[[364]](#footnote-364) and she is thus not opposed to such mergers in principle. However, she makes the observation that often:

‘the merger might take place within one lover alone, so to speak. One lover alone might change in ways that combine aspects of the subjectivity, agency, or objecthood of her lover with her own. [...] At the same time, little or nothing of her lover changes to incorporate elements of her.’[[365]](#footnote-365)

Furthermore, due to unequal power dynamics between men and women, for example that ‘women [...] are socialised to shoulder more of the burdens of sustaining close personal relationships than are men,’[[366]](#footnote-366) women are more likely to see their autonomy reduced, whilst men see theirs increased by romantic mergers. Thus, rather than Jason and Matilda sharing their lives on equal terms, Matilda might make more sacrifices than Jason for the good of their shared identity. Thus, their joint identity as a couple includes more of Jason within it, and so Matilda loses more than she gains and might experience their shared identity as a loss of her own identity.

Friedman’s worry about the practicalities of romantic mergers is, I think, a fair one. Whether or not the power dynamic occurs along gender lines — though she’s right that it often does — there is no doubt that there is often going to be a difference between lovers in the amount of their lives and identities they are willing to share. However, this does not mean that there is anything problematic about sharing an identity or about romantic love *per se,* but this is rather a reason to place greater emphasis on the necessity of equality and reciprocity between lovers and open and honest negotiation regarding the terms of the relationship. The worry does not show that we should not strive for romantic love, but rather that we should take great care to avoid the possible pitfalls associated with it. If it requires work though, then it must add value to our lives to be worth the effort. This is the issue to which I now turn.

**4) The value of a shared identity**

In order to make a convincing case that there is distinct value in romantic love, it is not enough to point out that a significant difference between friendship and romantic love is that romantic love involves sharing your identity in a way that friendship does not. I need also to establish that sharing your identity with someone is a worthwhile enterprise. Therefore, in this section I’ll give some reasons for thinking that a relationship with someone with whom you share your identity, is particularly valuable.[[367]](#footnote-367) When I join a romantic relationship, and agree to share my life and identity with another, I give up some of my freedom and gain some responsibilities. However, in doing so, my life becomes interesting and important to another person in a way that it is for no-one else. As someone else shares in my life and identity, certain details of my life that were previously interesting and important only to me, are now important to someone else. This makes me feel valued as an end in myself because the trivialities of my life are not significant to my lover for any reason other than that they are events that have happened in mylife that I care about (and sometimes even that I don’t care about). Thus my life is valuable to another for its own sake. My lover (ideally) *cares* about the man who spoke rudely to me on the bus, and about the embarrassment I felt at spilling my soup down my blouse at work because they are things that happened in my life that were significant to me. He may not be as angry or as upset as I am, but he nonetheless is interested and concerned. Indeed, I am justified in feeling angry or aggrieved if my lover does not care about such things because for him not to do so implies that he does not care about me.[[368]](#footnote-368)

This explains the great emptiness people feel after relationship break-ups and the sense of lack of importance in their daily comings and goings. Events that were once shared, and therefore significant in the outside world, become almost non-entities when there is no-one to share them with or tell about them. Jerome Neu argues that the fear of loss of love is tied to the ‘fear of annihilation’;[[369]](#footnote-369) we are afraid that our life will no longer matter in quite the same way if we lose a lover. We do not generally feel this way about losing a friend, since our lives do not have the same significance to friends. Jollimore also argues that part of what we value about love is that it makes our life seem important:

‘To be valued in this way, to be installed at the centre of the lover’s universe, is to have one’s reality and individuality truly and fully acknowledged. Only the lover, after all, looks closely, carefully, and generously enough to truly recognize the beloved in all her individuality. The great horror of not being loved is that one ceases to matter, that the mental and emotional events that fill one’s days are not really events at all, for they happen only in one’s own mind and not in any part of the outside world. To put the matter starkly, it is almost as if the unloved person does not exist at all.’[[370]](#footnote-370)

A similar point is made by Emily Brontë through the character of Catherine Earnshaw in *Wuthering Heights:*

‘I cannot express it; but surely you and everybody have a notion that there is, or should be an existence of yours beyond you. What were the use of creation if I were entirely contained here? My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff's miseries, and I watched and felt each from the beginning; my great thought in living is himself. If all else perished, and *he* remained, I should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger. I should not seem a part of it.’[[371]](#footnote-371)

Sharing a life and identity with another requires detailed knowledge and understanding of each other, which can only be attained through a great deal of attention. Romantic lovers thus bestow attention on each other that makes them each feel that their individuality is recognised and important. As Jollimore observes, ‘what is bestowed [on the beloved] […] is not the value itself […] but rather the sort of close, generous, and imaginative attention that allows valuable features of this sort fully to reveal themselves.’[[372]](#footnote-372) We know that our beloveds are not really funnier or kinder than anyone else in the world. However, they become such a valuable person to us because we are committed to finding their value. As described in the previous chapter, this is due to us valuing our relationship with them. They may not be funnier than anyone else but we appreciate their jokes in a way that we appreciate no-one else’s.[[373]](#footnote-373) This is perhaps what Solomon means when he says ‘the aim of love is to make a single person extraordinary and to reconceptualise oneself in his or her terms.’[[374]](#footnote-374) They are ‘extraordinary’ to us, because of how much attention we give to their value and part of the reason we do this is because we want to ‘reconceptualise ourselves in their terms’ by sharing their identity. We want to see ourselves through the eyes of an extraordinary person who has chosen us as someone with whom they would like to share their identity.

It is important, however, that the person who cares so much about the details of your life is someone with whom you also want to share your life and identity. As Bennett observes, ‘detailed attention from someone with whom I have no wish to engage in such a relationship gives me, not a sense of my own importance, but rather a sense of being violated, being stalked, being a person whose subjectivity is not fully their own.’[[375]](#footnote-375) We do not want attention purely for the sake of attention. We want it from someone at whom we also want to direct our attention. Sharing an identity with someone with whom you do not want to share your identity can feel oppressive and invasive. It forces you into presenting yourself to the outside world in a way that does not concur with the way you feel about yourself. Therefore, in order for the shared identity you have with your romantic partner to be valuable, you have to respect their individual identity and believe that it fits with your own. Consequently, the shared identity account of love can explain the way that romantic love can turn into repulsion far more readily than friendship can when you stop respecting your partner. This is because the identity of your partner is far more bound up with your own identity than that of your friends and so, if you no longer respect them or want them in your life, their presence can begin to disgust you.

Finally, through sharing our life with someone else we gain security and companionship. We have someone there with whom to enjoy what life has to offer, someone who is willing to do things with us. Therefore, romantic love provides us with security against boredom and loneliness. It can also make the world a less frightening place since there is someone with whom to share difficulties. A shared identity provides us with a ‘buffer’ against the world; we are no longer one person, but a team facing problems together. As Nozick puts it: ‘love places a floor under your well-being; it provides insurance in the face of fate’s blows.’[[376]](#footnote-376) We get this from friendship too; friends are also there to support us with problems. However, friends are less committed to doing so, and, as Bennett argues, they do not take on a responsibility towards you ‘as a whole.’[[377]](#footnote-377) It is generally accepted that friends might have something ‘more important to do’[[378]](#footnote-378) than care for you when you need them, such as caring for their own partner (provided that their partner’s needs are as great as yours). Your romantic partner, on the other hand, ought not to have anything more important to do than be there for you when you need them, apart from, perhaps, caring for those who depend on them, such as their children. They are also better placed to care for you, since through sharing your life they will understand what you need better than others and be more able to give it to you.

**5) Romantic love and exclusivity**

As I have argued, friends do, to some extent, share their life and identity. However, as I shall argue, part of what is distinctly valuable about romantic love is its degree of exclusivity. The vast majority of romantic relationships are between two people, and where they are not, they are between only a very small number of people. The decision to share a romantic relationship with someone often goes hand in hand with the decision not to share a similar kind of relationship with anyone else. This means agreeing to do certain activities (often sexual activities) with only that person and trying not to fall in love with anyone else. In this section I want to assess the value of a two-person romantic relationship. I will give two reasons here for why we might want our romantic relationship to be exclusive to two people. The first is that there are many practical benefits to having an exclusive romantic relationship. The second is that there is value in sharing an exclusive love relationship in itself, in that it affirms your unique importance. The romantic relationship is the only sort of relationship that is, more often than not, explicitly exclusive to two people, and I think this is one of the reasons for its intensity, importance and distinct value to us.

**5.1) Practical benefits to a two-person romantic relationship**

I have discussed the selectivity of romantic love and friendship in previous chapters. This is what makes romantic love and friendship conditional, and more prone to ending than familial love, which is not selective. One of the central differences between choosing friends and choosing a lover is that we tend to choose only *one* lover (at a time). This makes a substantial difference to the nature of the relationship and can cause a whole host of difficulties between lovers as, if their beloved cannot meet their expectations or fulfil their needs, they cannot simply turn to another lover in the way that they can turn to another friend. On the other hand, choosing only one lover gives the relationship a hugely elevated sense of value. As the relationship is exclusive to two people, the lovers must work harder at making it successful, or finish it and move onto another romantic relationship. By contrast, friends are less likely to break up with each other, or make a concerted effort to fix their relationship by, for example, going to relationship counselling. This is because when things don’t work well between them they can just spend more time with other friends, whilst still maintaining the relationship in some form. As C.S. Lewis observes: ‘lovers are always talking to one another about their love; friends hardly ever about their friendship.’[[379]](#footnote-379) Friends don’t tend to have sit-down conversations about how to improve their friendship in the way that lovers do. Furthermore, romantic lovers have a greater obligation towards one another to try to make the relationship successful as if one lover does not pull their weight, the other lover has no-one else with whom to share a romantic relationship. This gives the lovers a great sense of responsibility towards one another.

In addition, as romantic love involves sharing one’s identity with one’s beloved, it requires a lot of effort, time, emotional investment and commitment. It requires detailed attention to, and knowledge of, the beloved in order to care for them effectively and share their life. When we enter into romantic relationships we usually have to make sacrifices in other areas of our lives; for example we might have to see our friends less, or spend less time on our interests. If we enter into another romantic relationship, or into several other romantic relationships, more sacrifices will have to be made, at least some of which will probably involve the first romantic relationship. It is sometimes pointed out, as an argument against monogamy, that we do not apply the same reasoning to other kinds of relationship. If a mother has ten children this does not entail that she loves any of them less than she would if she had only one child. However, this is because a mother loves her children simply because they are her children, and due to this relationship she loves them unconditionally. Romantic relationships are more conditional and, because of what we want from them, a reasonable condition for it might be that the relationship is exclusive (though this is not to say that it is unreasonable to prefer non-exclusivity). Furthermore, though a mother might love each of her children equally, there is no way that she can devote as much time and attention to ten, or even to two children, as she could to one child, without making sacrifices in other areas of her life. Thus, when parents are considering whether to have more children or not, they might take into account the question of whether having another child will mean that they have enough time to give to their other child/children. A similar question must be asked with relation to romantic love; however the situation is different because one’s partner has an equal say in whether or not you take an additional lover to the extent that they can leave you if you do so against their wishes.

As well as simply ‘having less of yourself to go around’, being in more than one romantic relationship makes the goal of sharing a life much harder, since it makes the ‘pool of wills’ in the ‘we’ larger. If Jason wants to live in London, and Matilda wants to live in Manchester, this is a difficult situation, but there are only two interests to negotiate. If there were five people in the relationship, all of whom wanted to live in different places, it might be impossible to come to a solution which made them all happy. There would also be five people’s parents for the group to visit, five people’s interests to consider when making holiday plans, and five people’s different ways of raising children to balance.[[380]](#footnote-380) Of course, non-monogamous relationships do not always take this group form. Another alternative might be to have a ‘network relationship’, for example, for Jason to be with Matilda and Janine; and for Matilda to be with Jason and Susan. Again though, in situations like this there will be practical difficulties in sharing lives. If Jason and Susan do not get on, then Matilda will have to choose who to spend most of her life with, or alternate between them. If Jason has to do the same thing and alternate between Matilda and Janine, it may prove very difficult for him and Matilda to spend time together and near impossible for them to make key life decisions together. If Jason and Matilda agree that their relationship will be the primary relationship and Janine and Susan will be subsidiaries, it seems that Jason and Matilda will have to build in some exclusivity into their relationship in order to distinguish between the relationships. For example, they might agree to spend weekends with each other and see their other lovers on week-nights only. There might also be moral issues to do with fairness here; Janine and Susan might not be happy being in subsidiary relationships. Thus, whilst non-exclusive love is certainly possible, it will be difficult to incorporate the important feature of a shared life and identity within it.

Another problem is that intimacy may be lost when relationships are opened up. As Robert Gerstein notes, part of what makes intimate relationships intimate is that the people within them share information they share with no-one else, some of which will be the nature of the relationship itself.[[381]](#footnote-381) Intimacy is a ‘zero-sum game’ in that, if Jason tells his friend Hannah everything that he tells Matilda, and does all of the same things with Hannah that he does with Matilda, his and Matilda’s relationship will be less intimate than it would be if he shared things with Matilda only. It is not possible to have intimate relationships at all if you share everything with everyone and often the more secret, private and exclusive an activity or conversation is, the more intimate it is. Thus, the intimacy of non-exclusive relationships may not be as strong as the intimacy of exclusive relationships. However, this will, of course, depend on the relationship, and some non-exclusive relationships may involve greater honesty and openness which will lead to increased intimacy.

Gerstein makes another interesting observation though that intimacy requires total immersion in what you’re doing, a feeling of ‘losing yourself’. He argues that we cannot immerse ourselves in this way when we feel like we’re being observed. This is because when we’re being observed we cannot help but see our experience from the point of view of the observer, and thus we become detached from our actions, perceiving them but feeling independent of them.[[382]](#footnote-382) When there are more than two people in a relationship, there will always be an observer of sorts, though they will not always be physically present. Unless all of the people in the relationship share all of their intimate experiences together, there will always be at least one person who is not directly involved in the intimate experience but who perceives it from the outside. For example, if Jason and Matilda have sex or a very intimate conversation, Jason might think that Matilda will tell one of the other members of their relationship, or he might feel obliged to share their intimate moment with the others, and consequently he might find himself less able to lose himself in their moment. Even if neither of them tells the other members of the relationship about their intimacy, even knowing that this is perhaps what they ought to do can be enough to make them feel like they are being observed.

**5.2) Practical benefits to a romantic relationship of more than two people**

There are benefits to romantic relationships of more than two people as well. As Deirdre Golash points out, in a triad relationship, if one member is busy with other things, there is another there to support you should you need support. In addition, if one of them dies, the other two will still have each other, and if they are able to find a replacement third person before one of them dies, none of them will be left all alone.[[383]](#footnote-383) This is also true in the case of relationship break-downs.

In addition, polyamorous people often report that their relationships are more honest than monogamous relationships, as they do not have to pretend to desire only each other, and thus they trust each other more.[[384]](#footnote-384) Although having only one partner gives you both a great sense of responsibility towards each other, it also means that there is no-one else to turn to if one of you does not fulfil their responsibilities. Your partner might be good enough to stay with, but not quite good enough to completely satisfy you, and this can lead to feelings of inadequacy on their part and resentment on yours. When a friend does not fully understand you, or lets you down, there are other friends you can go to and so you do not need or expect as much from each individual friend. Perhaps it would be better then, if there were other romantic lovers you could go to when things don’t work out with one. There is also an argument that children might be better off being brought up by more than two people as they, too, will have more people to provide them with love, support, and education.

Nonetheless, a romantic relationship shared by two people is fundamentally different from one shared by more than two. Indeed, we give such relationships different names, such as ‘open relationships’ and ‘polyamorous relationships’. This is not the same with friendship: although Jason might have less time to spend with his friend, Lauren, when he starts up a new friendship with Michael, his relationship with her need not change in any noticeable way. If he begins a new romantic relationship though, then it seems that something between him and Matilda will change; their relationship cannot continue just as it did before. They may continue to love each other and to enjoy each other’s company but their relationship will be of a different kind in an important way. The reason for this might be because a two-person relationship affirms your unique importance in a distinctive way.

**5.3) Exclusivity and unique importance[[385]](#footnote-385)**

People in romantic relationships don’t tend to want their relationship to be exclusive to two people for practical reasons only. They want their relationship to be exclusive to two because the exclusivity of their relationship adds to its value and makes it particularly valuable to them.[[386]](#footnote-386) By choosing me as someone to share an exclusive relationship with – that involves sharing their life and identity – my lover makes me feel that my life and identity are worth something, indeed that they are deeply significant to someone else. As Sartre puts it, it can make us ‘feel that our existence is justified.’[[387]](#footnote-387) This does not necessarily mean that I am worth more than other people, but rather that I am worth *enough* for him to pay the attention to me required to come to appreciate my unique value. As Bennett suggests, it means that someone wants to make me uniquely important to them. He argues, following in the Hegelian tradition, that a fundamental human need is to be recognised, and that romantic love might be the only place in which our whole life is given recognition as being important. In other places, we are valued and recognised as having importance because of our skills or what we can contribute, for example we might be recognised as being a good worker, a good cook or a good pianist. Being recognised for skills and utility makes us feel that our pursuits and efforts are of value, but it does not make us feel that our life, in all its details, is worthwhile. As Bennett observes: ‘we feel as though the details of our individual lives are important in their own right, that as the details of a human life, they have a value that transcends their intrinsic interest or usefulness.’[[388]](#footnote-388) Therefore, we seek recognition for the *content* of our lives[[389]](#footnote-389) and, indeed, we may need this now more than previously, because modern Western social structures can contribute to a feeling of alienation, in that your worth is determined more by your usefulness than your individuality and your life ‘story’.[[390]](#footnote-390)

We do not have our unique importance affirmed in the same way this by familial love, because our family have not chosen us[[391]](#footnote-391) and would have loved anyone in our position. Therefore, the recognition they give us for the content of our lives provides us with less validation than we get from friends or romantic lovers who have chosen us partly on the basis of the value they attach to the content of our lives. However, although we can get an important kind of validation from intimate friendship, we do not get quite the same sort of recognition as we do with romantic love, because friendship is not exclusive to two people.[[392]](#footnote-392) Someone choosing you to be one of their many friends suggests that you are good enough to be one of a number of people with whom to share a relationship. By contrast, someone choosing you to be an exclusive romantic partner suggests that you are good enough to be *the only one* to occupy this very important role.

As Keller points out, a significant feature of romantic love is that it makes us feel good about ourselves, and this is partly because ‘you, of all people, are seen by the lover as someone who can share her life at the most intimate level, can make her life happier and more fulfilling.’[[393]](#footnote-393) The ‘of all people’ clause in this phrase is important: you derive a lot of value from the fact that she wants to share her life in this way with you only. As Bennett suggests, being chosen over everyone else ‘affirms and recognises your sense that the things that make you a particular individual are valuable because someone has chosen you *for* those things.’[[394]](#footnote-394) Your value as a distinct individual is fully recognised because the lover has chosen to be in an exclusive relationship with you. You are thus recognised as being different, in ways that matter, from everyone else. Furthermore, they have chosen you as someone to whom they want to devote a great deal of attention and whom they want to love. When someone chooses you to be their friend they do not affirm your unique importance as they do not fully commit to sharing your life and identity, because they have other friends with whom they share aspects of their life and identity.[[395]](#footnote-395) They choose you as someone with whom they want to spend parts of their life, someone to whom they want to reveal certain things, and someone about whom they want to know certain things. They do not choose you as a whole to share the whole of themselves with.

As I have discussed previously, reciprocity, or at least the desire for reciprocity, is an essential feature of romantic love, and the reciprocity of the romantic relationship contributes greatly to its value. However, a possible objection to the idea that romantic love is important because it affirms your unique importance might be that my unique importance would be affirmed far more strongly were five people to choose me to be their romantic beloved, and I were to choose no-one. In such a situation, I would have five people to turn to when I needed support, five people who were concerned with the details of my life, five people to lavish me with attention and care. Moreover, I would not have any obligations towards any of them, and so my life would not be made any more difficult by their love. In response to this objection, I would agree that perhaps in such a situation I would feel in some way validated by the love of these people. However, the validation would be more akin to that generated by fandom. I would not be able to enjoy the rewards that come from sharing an identity with someone. In addition, if I did not love any of these people, their choosing me to love exclusively would not mean as much as if they were someone whom I also wanted to love exclusively. This is because I do not value any of them enough as people to make them my romantic partner, and so I probably don’t value their opinion of me as much. Furthermore, the validation they can give me would have a kind of falsity to it, and might feel unjustified. If they love me because they value their relationship with me, but the relationship is one-sided, they seem to love me on the basis of an imagined or hoped-for relationship and thus don’t really love me at all. As I have argued before, to not even desire reciprocity is probably a sign that you are not really in love in a romantic way, because a romantic relationship is, ideally, a mutual, reciprocal relationship between equals. Romantic love involves a desire to be loved in return, and we want this love to be given freely, because of who we are and the relationship we share with our lover. We ought, therefore, to be suspicious of someone claiming to love us romantically who does not want their love to be reciprocated.

**6) Conclusion**

In this chapter I have examined some of the reasons why an exclusive romantic relationship between two people might be distinctly valuable. We could have only friendship-type relationships, some of which included sex. However, we tend to find value in having, in addition, a central two-person romantic relationship. This chapter has sought to understand why that is. I have approached this question by considering the differences between romantic love and friendship since they are comparable as relationships. There are many similarities between friendship and romantic love, and several of the differences between the two types of relationship are differences in degree. However, there are differences in kind too. If there were not, our best friend would be our romantic partner, and we would not even need the concept of romantic love at all.

I have suggested that a key difference between romantic love and friendship is that we share our identity and our life with our romantic lover in a fuller, more committed, more well-defined way than we do with our friends. This provides a source of value by making us feel that our life matters. A second difference in kind is that romantic love is a more exclusive relationship than friendship, and is more often than not, exclusive to two people. The exclusivity of a two-person relationship has both contingent and non-contingent value. Its contingent value derives from the practical benefits of having only one romantic partner. It is easier to share one’s life with one person only, and there is greater potential for intimacy within an exclusive relationship. There is also value in exclusivity in itself, in that having someone choose us as the only person with whom they want to share this special type of relationship provides us with recognition that we are ‘good enough’, and that the content of our life is valuable in itself. Therefore, there is distinct value in having an exclusive love relationship that cannot be derived from a non-exclusive love relationship. This is not to say that monogamous love is inherently better than non-monogamous love, but that it has a particular type of value.

To summarise the previous four chapters: so far I have established that there is a distinct kind of love, which I have called ‘romantic love’ that depends on a particular kind of relationship. This relationship is a caring, exclusive relationship and tends to be exclusive to two people, though it is not essential that it has only two people in it. It includes four central features. The first is pleasure: an ideal romantic relationship will make the lovers happy and it is because we expect it to make us happy that romantic love is selective and conditional. Secondly, a romantic relationship is characterised by a sense of union: the lovers share their lives and identity. Thirdly, the lovers are intimate with each other, physically, emotionally and psychologically. Finally, the lovers must allow themselves to be vulnerable with each other, but also to care for one another. There is thus a particular kind of trust that comes with an ideal romantic relationship in that, in the best cases, the lovers know that they can express their vulnerabilities to one another but will be looked after when they do so.

**Chapter Six: Why does a romantic relationship typically include sex?**

**1) Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I argued that the romantic relationship is distinct from friendship because of the unique way that it involves sharing a life, and because it is a much more exclusive relationship. Furthermore, I argued that a two-person romantic relationship can be worthwhile because it provides you with someone who recognises the significance of the whole of your life, thus affirming your unique importance. I also argued, somewhat briefly, against the claim that sex is *the* distinguishing feature of a romantic relationship. This is because some friends have sex and some romantic partners do not.

However, there are questions that remain about romantic love and monogamy. Monogamy is more than just a two-person relationship; it also tends to require sexual exclusivity. Thus, in order to provide a full account of a romantic relationship I need to consider two questions. Firstly: why is it that the type of relationship I described in the last chapter tends also to be a *sexual* relationship? This question is rarely asked; it is usually taken for granted that there exists a certain kind of love which is, among other things, sexual. However, it seems that there is no necessary link between love and sex: it is conceptually possible for there to be relationships that are the same as those that we call ‘romantic’ now, but just do not include sex. Indeed, people do have non-sexual romantic relationships, and for those people love and sex might be decoupled. We could imagine a world in which people had romantic relationships which were of the same type as the ones we have now, but did not typically include sex. Therefore, it is interesting and important for the purposes of this thesis to consider why, instead, we live in a world in which sex is almost a requirement of a certain kind of love.

The second question is why it is that, in addition to having sex with our romantic partners, we tend to see sexual *exclusivity* as almost essential to romantic love. One’s partner having sex with someone outside of the relationship is usually thought to be a perfectly justifiable reason to break up with them. Though this question is related to the first, it is a separate question because the two requirements – sex and sexual exclusivity – can come apart. A romantic relationship might include sex but not be sexually exclusive; or it might be sexually exclusive even though the couple do not have sex with each other. It might even be more important to a couple that neither partner has sex with anyone outside of the relationship than that they have sex with each other. Nonetheless, it does seem that sex has to be associated with love in some significant way in order to make sense of this restriction at all. Restricting your partner from playing chess with anyone but you does not make sense and seems unreasonable because chess does not (except in rare cases) bear any relation to love.[[396]](#footnote-396) Thus, if there is a justification for the norm and practice of sexual exclusivity, it needs to be at least partly derived from the relationship between sex and love.

In this chapter, I will try to answer the first question (the second question will be considered in the following chapter), considering the justification for, and value of sex as a feature of romantic love. My response will be structured as follows. In Section 2, I set the scene by making some observations about the ways that we typically think about sex and love and the questions that are raised as a result. In Section 3, I consider a sexual liberationist account, which claims that we would be better off ridding ourselves of the assumptions that lead us to think that sex and love are related. I argue that this account exaggerates the differences between sex and love and overlooks their similarities. Furthermore, it is largely compatible with the idea that sex is an important feature of love.

In Section 4, I present my own account of the relationship between sex and love, arguing that sex is partly constitutive of the central goods of a romantic relationship, and can be an important vehicle for romantic love in two ways. It can express romantic love and it can ‘make love’, creating and intensifying it. This is because the central goods that we want from romantic love with which I concluded the previous chapter: 1) pleasure, (2) union/physical closeness, (3) intimacy and (4) vulnerability and care, can all be found in sex. Because of this, we seek romantic partners to whom we are sexually attracted, and we are sexually attracted to people, in part, because they would make a good romantic partner to us. Nonetheless, this does not imply that a romantic relationship automatically becomes less valuable the less sex it includes. At the beginning of a relationship it might be more important to cement the romantic nature of your relationship and, as sex can be a particularly intense expression and creator of the four central goods, it might feel more important in the early stages of the relationship. However, as the relationship progresses, the couple might be more interested in other aspects of the relationship, and so sex might become a less significant part of it.

**2) Sex and love: some observations**

It is undeniable that we associate romantic love with sex; indeed the kind of love which I have called ‘romantic love’ in this thesis is often referred to as ‘erotic love’ or ‘sexual love’. For some people, sex is *the* distinguishing feature of a romantic relationship; the difference between loving somebody as a friend and ‘being in love’ with them is often taken to be the presence of sexual desire. Furthermore, all other things being equal, regular sex is seen as a sign of a good relationship, and it is not unusual for people to worry about their relationships, or even to end them, if they are no longer having sex or having sex only very irregularly.[[397]](#footnote-397)

Sex is not related to non-romantic love though. It is not a component of familial love; indeed, it is fervently discouraged between family members to the point of being illegal and a matter of social disgust and abhorrence. In addition, although friends do sometimes have sex, it is viewed very differently from sex in a romantic relationship. It is not an essential part of friendship and regular sex is not a marker of a good friendship. Furthermore, it would be highly inappropriate for someone to expect their friend to have sex with them merely because they were friends. It is a common assumption that sex might complicate a pre-existing friendship or lead to one of the friends developing unreciprocated feelings of romantic love for the other.[[398]](#footnote-398) Conversely, it is the ‘default setting’ for a romantic relationship to include sex, and it seems reasonable to expect your romantic partner to have sex with you at least occasionally, and to feel hurt if they don’t want to. Rather than complicating a romantic relationship, we assume that sex will improve and intensify it. Indeed, it is usually justifiable to end a romantic relationship if your partner will not ever have sex with you simply because they are not attracted to you,[[399]](#footnote-399) though it would be completely unreasonable to end a friendship because your friend refused to sleep with you. Therefore, our tendency to view sex as related to romantic love must be at least partly to do with what is distinct about *romantic* love – its features that mark it out from other kinds of love and relationship, rather than to do with the features of love in general.

On the other hand, sex does not seem to be the most important feature of romantic love and it is not essential to it. Furthermore, sex might be a significant part of a relationship for only a relatively short period of it. A couple might have sex with each other only because they believe they should or because they cannot have sex with anyone else, as they have decided to be sexually exclusive. Therefore, romantic love does not always involve an overwhelming passionate desire to have sex with one’s partner. Moreover, there are people who consider themselves to be in romantic relationships though they have never had sex with their partner. However, in these cases, we expect there to be some reason for them not having sex, which means they cannot or don’t want to have sex in general, such as that one or both of them is asexual or physically unable to have sex. If it was possible for two sexually active people to have a romantic relationship but just not desire or have sex *with each other,* then it would be possible for two heterosexual men who are not attracted to each other, even two brothers, to have a romantic relationship. This certainly does not fit into our current conceptual scheme of relationships; we would describe their relationship as an intimate friendship or sibling relationship, not a romantic relationship.

In addition, non-sexual romantic relationships often include other kinds of physical intimacy, such as: kissing, cuddling, stroking, sharing a bed, holding hands, or putting an arm around each other. If a couple never engaged in *any* kind of physical intimacy, despite being physically and psychologically able to, we would question whether the relationship was romantic by nature. Thus, it seems that it is necessary, barring impediments, for romantic love to be expressed or represented physically, and that where sex is possible between lovers, this will usually be one form of physical intimacy in which they will engage.

To sum up this section: in British culture, there are (at least) two major assumptions about the role of sex in a romantic relationship. The first is that we see regular sex as *ceteris paribus,* a marker of a good relationship. The second is that, for a relationship which involves no sexual intimacy to count as a romantic one, we assume that either the relationship used to be sexual, or they are planning to have sex in the future, or one or both of the partners does not want to or cannot have sex in general. Thus, the standard romantic relationship is a sexual relationship for at least part of it. These observations lead to two questions, which will form the focus of this chapter: why does the archetypal romantic relationship include sex and why do we see (regular) sex as a marker of a good relationship? In the next section I consider the view that there is no relationship between sex and love, but I argue that this view is somewhat beside the point for our purposes.

**3) The sexual liberationist account: there is no relationship between sex and love**

If the meaning of sex comes from us rather than being based on anything objective, then it might seem that we are free to construct almost any meaning we want for it, within the constraints of what sort of meaning is intelligible to us, or indeed, no meaning at all. Furthermore, it might be argued that we would lead more fulfilling lives if we ascribed less significance to sex and simply enjoyed it for its own sake. I will refer to the view that sex has no intrinsic meaning and that we ought to decouple it from love as ‘the sexual liberationist account’. Someone arguing in favour of maintaining the relationship between love and sex needs to either convince us that there is something fitting to the relationship and/or that there is something desirable about it. A sexual liberationist thus needs to deny both of these claims by arguing that: (1) sex and love are different in important ways; (2) decoupling sex and love would benefit us by giving us greater freedom in the ways that we construct our relationships and have sex.

To clarify: proponents of this kind of view, at least as I am construing it, would not go as far as to claim that you *should not* have sex with your romantic partner, only that it should not be an expectation that you do so, and that sexual exclusivity ought not to be a requirement of romantic love. Furthermore, they would claim that we should be able to have sex with people without them expecting a relationship or love as a consequence, and that there is nothing morally wrong with sex without love. Thus, although they would not oppose the practice of having sex with one’s beloved, they would oppose the norm of associating love with sex. Therefore, the sexual liberationist account is claiming that the relationship between sex and love is socially normative in an inappropriate way. In what follows, I’ll explain and respond to two arguments in favour of decoupling sex and love.

**3.1) Sex and love are dissimilar**

Theodor Reik suggests that there are such great dissimilarities between sex and love, when considered in their purest form, that it does not make sense to associate the two, or to believe that they are of ‘the same origin and character’. He gives several examples of the differences:

‘Sex is a biological urge, a product of chemistry within the organism; love is an emotional craving, a creation of individual imagination […] in the first there is a quest for physical satisfaction; in the second there is the pursuit of happiness […] Sex has a general meaning; love a personal one. The first is a call from nature; the second from culture. Sex is common to men and beasts; love or romance is unknown to millions of people even now. Sex is indiscriminate; love is directed to a certain person.’[[400]](#footnote-400)

Alan Goldman also points out the differences between sex and love. Firstly, he argues that romantic love aims at permanence, whereas sexual desire can be fleeting. Secondly, romantic love is ‘more or less exclusive,’ but sexual desire aims at variety; and sexual exclusivity involves sacrifice whereas emotional exclusivity does not.[[401]](#footnote-401) He acknowledges that ‘sex can take on heightened value and meaning when it becomes a vehicle for the expression of feelings of love and tenderness’, but he goes on to say that, ‘so can many other usually mundane activities such as getting up early to make breakfast on a Sunday, cleaning the house and so on’,[[402]](#footnote-402) implying that sex has no particular connection to love and tenderness beyond being one of many mundane activities that, done in a certain way, can express love. Furthermore, he suggests that the psychological intimacy that arises through sex ‘may be a function of the restrictive sexual ethic itself, rather than a legitimate apology for it.’[[403]](#footnote-403) Although it is physically intimate, it is psychologically intimate only because it is taboo and so its intimacy should not be celebrated and cannot justify restricting it to love relationships. Thus, both Reik and Goldman try to undermine the idea that there is something fitting or common-sensical about the norm that there is a relationship between love and sex.

However, whilst, of course, there are differences between love and sex, the claims Reik and Goldman make are debatable and certainly don’t apply to all instances of sex and love. For example, Reik is wrong that sex is indiscriminate but love is directed at an individual: even the least discerning person would not have sex with just anyone; they would probably care, to some degree, about the age, appearance and gender of the person. Further, sex is certainly not always experienced as a general biological urge seeking physical satisfaction. Sex can be highly personal, emotional and involve a lot of thought and creativity and we often feel that there is a rational justification for why we are sexually attracted to some people and not others. In addition, Goldman’s claim – that sexual exclusivity requires sacrifice but emotional exclusivity does not – does not fit with all people’s experiences. Some people find it very difficult to be emotionally close to only one person, and some truly don’t want to have sex with anyone else but their partner and so don’t consider their sexual exclusivity a sacrifice. Indeed, some people who have sex promiscuously actually desire and seek sexually exclusivity rather than viewing it as a sacrifice. Moreover, sex is not just one of numerous everyday activities, such as cleaning the house, that when done in the right way can express love and take on heightened value. It is true that a particular instance of cleaning the house might be a more effective expression of love than a particular instance of sex. However, though cleaning tasks ought to be shared fairly between partners, cleaning is not, in general, considered an important part of a romantic relationship. Indeed, a relationship where neither partner ever had to clean would probably be a better relationship than one where they both cleaned a lot. Sex, on the other hand, is considered, in general, to be an important feature of romantic love.

Finally, the psychological intimacy of sex may well be caused by the ‘restrictive sexual ethic’ of our culture, but the sexual ethic is related to various other norms which are deeply embedded and pervasive, and are not generally experienced as repressive by most people, such as the norm of wearing clothes and respecting each other’s personal space. As I discuss later, part of what makes sex intimate is that we usually do it in private, it often involves nudity and we do it with relatively few people. Therefore, for sex to be less intimate we would need to live in a culture in which public sex, public nudity and promiscuity were not only permitted but encouraged. This would not only require an overhaul of much of society, it would also be unwanted by many people who value privacy and personal space. Moreover, many people value the intimacy of sex, whatever its cause, and would happily use it as an ‘apology’ for the restrictive sexual ethic.

In addition to over-emphasising and over-generalising the differences between love and sex, Reik and Goldman avoid discussing the similarities between love and sex, which I will describe in Section 4. Once we take these into account we will see that although there is not an inherent or necessary connection between sex and love, sex is similar to love in some important ways and so it does make sense to connect them.

**3.2) It is undesirable to maintain the norm of the relationship between sex and love**

A sexual liberationist might argue that whether or not it makes sense to connect sex and love, it is undesirable to do so and we would lead more fulfilling, flourishing lives if we decoupled them. To compare: whether or not it ‘makes sense’ in any way to have a norm where women stay at home and men go to work is inconsequential, because the norm is so undesirable. Perhaps the strongest argument against the desirability of the norm of associating sex and love is that it restricts us in the ways that we have sex and construct our relationships. For example, the norm prevents us from having a romantic relationship with someone to whom we are not sexually attracted, and makes it more difficult to have sex with our friends. Furthermore, associating sex and love gives rise to the norm of sexual exclusivity, which is at least *prima facie* restrictive. Therefore, the sexual liberationist might argue that we ought to decouple sex and love in order to gain greater autonomy over our sexual lives and relationships.

Another argument against coupling sex with love is that focussing on the relationship between love and sex blinds us to the value of sex without love. Russell Vannoy argues that sex is better as sex when ‘unencumbered by love’. Non-lovers have the fun of seducing another, no obligation to have sex unless they want to, more freedom to experiment without guilt or fear of offending their partner, no fear of performing badly (if having sex with a stranger whom they won’t see again), and they can focus more on the sensuous aspects of sex, ‘enjoying sex for sex’s sake’.[[404]](#footnote-404) Frederick Elliston goes further, arguing that promiscuity can help us to lead flourishing lives because ‘it can engage one’s “higher faculties” of reason, judgment and good taste’ and help us to develop sexual body language.[[405]](#footnote-405) By restricting sex to loving relationships, we cannot be promiscuous and thus we limit the ways in which we can develop these faculties.

I agree that there is value in sex without love, but this is irrelevant to the argument that there is value in maintaining the norm of sex being a feature of romantic love. The claims here are not that we ought not to see sex as an important feature of romantic love, but that we should not ignore or denigrate the value of sex without love and that we should be more tolerant of those who want to engage in it. However, the claim that there is value in sex without love is compatible with there being value in sex between lovers. Nevertheless, admitting that sex can be distinctly valuable between lovers *and* between non-lovers entails that many of the goods that accrue from sex in both cases lose their unique instantiation, and thus both become less valuable. To compare: in British society it is customary to give presents to mark birthdays and to mark Christmas, but if we were to give presents to mark only one of those occasions, the presents would be more special and significant. Presents would, therefore, become more significant than they are currently. Nonetheless, on the whole, this is a sacrifice worth making because we value both Christmas and birthdays and presents are a good way to mark the occasions. The same is true of sex: there is distinct value in sex with love and sex without love, and so even if admitting this will diminish the value of both, it is a sacrifice worth making so that we have the opportunity to experience the different kinds of value sex can give us.

Furthermore, whilst it would probably be better for us to have greater freedom in the way that we construct our relationships, this is compatible with there being some norms governing relationships, and in particular with there being the norm that we have at least some sex with our romantic partner. If there were absolutely no norms regarding relationships then we would struggle to know what we could reasonably expect from a given relationship and what we owed to the other person in it. Whatever norms there are regarding relationships, there will always be people who don’t want to go along with them and for those people the norms may feel restrictive. It is thus important that norms regarding relationships allow some room for manoeuvre. Nonetheless, in order to argue against the norm of the relationship between sex and love, the sexual liberationist needs to do more than just claim that we ought to have more freedom in the way that we construct our relationships; they need to show that there is something particularly troubling or problematically restrictive about the view that sex is connected with love. I think they would struggle to do this, since for most people, sex does come hand-in-hand with a certain kind of love, and this is something they value. There are potential problems which could arise from the view that sex and love are connected, such as that some people in romantic relationships feel pressured to have sex that they don’t really want, or that people mistakenly think there is something wrong with their relationship because they are having less sex. However, these are not problems with the view that sex and love are connected *per se,* and thus do not warrant totally abandoning the norm that we have sex with our romantic partners.

The principle aims of sexual liberationist thinking seem to be about making sex less taboo, more pleasurable and allowing us to have more of it, with more people, in more varied contexts, if we wish. None of these aims conflicts with the idea that when one is in a romantic relationship sex will usually be a part of it. Therefore, we can accept the claim that some of the conventions and taboos that surround sex are unnecessarily repressive and harmful, while maintaining that there is a connection between love and sex, which is based on the meanings that sex has to us, and is not in itself troubling. Furthermore, as Michael Bayles notes, ‘if sexual intercourse ceases to have this function [expressing love] in society, some other act will undoubtedly replace it in this function’.[[406]](#footnote-406) In the next section I will argue that sex plays an important role in a romantic relationship constituting, building and expressing its central goods, and so if we value romantic love, we have reason to value sex as part of it.

**4) Accounting for the importance of sex within a romantic relationship**

In the introduction to this thesis I denied that there is a moral reason to restrict sex to monogamous love relationships or marriages. This is because I am not convinced either that sex outside of such relationships is necessarily harmful, or that sex within such relationships is always more moral than sex outside of them. Nonetheless, I disagree that sex can simply be anything we want it to be, or that it is nothing more than an action done with another to produce physically pleasurable sensations.[[407]](#footnote-407) We live in a world that is full of symbolic meaning and interaction, and sex, in most cultures, including our own, is a very symbolic and meaningful action. As Paul Gregory observes, the meaning we tend to attribute to sex is highly disproportionate to its physiological pleasure and ‘the sexual act is perhaps the one action which remains on occasion supremely a symbol.’[[408]](#footnote-408) Sexual pleasure is intense, but it may be short-lived, and is sometimes unsatisfactory. Furthermore, sex does not always produce pleasure and pleasure is not the only reason people seek it; if it were then, as Scruton acknowledges, we would all be fully sexually satisfied with masturbation.[[409]](#footnote-409) In any case, there are many other comparable pleasures to which we do not give as much attention or meaning. Looked at from a purely physical perspective, sex does not seem to warrant all the attention we give it and it does seem irrational to connect it with love. But it is not just a physically pleasurable act to most people; it is something we care about and find important, and to understand the relationship between love and sex, we need to figure out why this is.

In this section I will discuss some of the meanings that sex has in our culture, arguing that sex is both constitutive of and an important vehicle (to borrow Goldman’s metaphor) for the goods of a romantic relationship. I use the term, ‘vehicle’ to have two meanings: (1) sex as a means of expressing love and (2) sex as a means of moving love forward or building love. Thus sex does almost literally ‘make love’, as well as being a means of communicating love already felt. At the end of the previous chapter I discussed four good of romantic love: 1) pleasure, (2) union/physical closeness, (3) intimacy and (4) vulnerability and care. Here I will discuss how sex can be a vehicle for these goods. They are inter-related but I will discuss each of them separately for clarity.

**4.1) Pleasure**

Although sex is not merely a physically pleasurable act, a discussion of sex that did not mention its pleasure would be seriously incomplete. The desire for pleasure is not always at the forefront of a person’s mind when they have sex, but often it is, and it is usually there somewhere. Indeed, sex offers the possibility not only of physical pleasure, but of certain sorts of cognitive pleasure too; for example, one might feel a sense of achievement from giving another person intense pleasure. What’s more, the pleasures of sex are not distinct from the pleasures of romantic love, but are intertwined with it.

Romantic love is, as I have argued in previous chapters, distinct from familial love in that you select your romantic partner and the relationship tends to be conditional on you enjoying the relationship and finding it valuable (though this needs to be balanced with a degree of commitment). We expect romantic love to be joyful, exciting and add value to our lives; we want it to be, among other things, a pleasure. Sex can thus partly constitute the pleasure of a romantic relationship, as well as being a vehicle for it, expressing and building it. Sex can be fun: it can be silly, relaxing and sensuous. Moreover, in ideal cases, its pleasure is very intense and (aside from masturbation) depends upon the co-operation of both parties; sex, like a conversation, is a mutual act in which you are intensely aware of the other person, their actions and feelings. As Morgan puts it, ‘one experiences *you both* as feeling pleasure at your dynamic bodily interaction, and so your pleasure is taken in an act experienced as being pleasurable for both of you.’[[410]](#footnote-410) Sex is usually better when both partners care about the pleasure of the other, as well as their own. Therefore, within a loving relationship, sex is a vehicle not only for the closeness of the couple, but also for the pleasure and fun that the relationship brings them. If done well, sex can benefit the relationship by giving partners a space in which their main priority is to attend to and please each other. We think that a relationship that includes frequent sex is a good relationship, in part, just because it involves sexual pleasure, which is considered inherently good, but also because we assume that the partners want to make each other feel good and probably know how to sexually please one another.

This is not to say that a relationship which includes sex is necessarily more pleasurable or fulfilling than one that does not. It might be argued that if a person does not want to experience sexual pleasure with their partner, and indeed give their partner sexual pleasure then there is something missing in the relationship. However, this will depend, in part, on how much the partners enjoy sex generally. Thus, if someone just doesn’t like sex in general then their relationship would probably be less pleasurable if it included a lot of sex. In addition, a relationship that was once very sexual but is no longer is not necessarily a less happy relationship; the couple might just find pleasure elsewhere. Nonetheless, as I pointed out above, pleasure will get us only so far in understanding the relationship between love and sex. Pleasure in itself cannot justify the significance we give to sex in a romantic relationship. An individual might find surfing more pleasurable, in general, than sex, but not find it important that he surfs with his partner. Conversely, he might not find sex with his partner very pleasurable, but still think it is important that they have sex together. This seems reasonable, but if pleasure was the only justification for the significance of sex in the relationship then this would be irrational. Therefore, in order to make fully intelligible the idea that sex is an important feature of romantic love, we need to consider some of the other features of sex and how they relate to romantic love.

**4.2) Union**

As I argued in the previous chapter, perhaps the most central and distinctive good of romantic love is the way in which the lovers typically share their lives and identity. They want to form a unit, or a ‘we’ and they tend to represent this through various kinds of interaction, which are at least partly symbolic, such as holding hands, sending joint birthday cards, and arriving at social events together. These kinds of symbolic interactions not only show the outside world that they see themselves as part of a ‘we’, they also help to create it, and are thus partly constitutive of the ‘we’. Sex fits into this category of interaction, (though it, of course, has other functions) but it is usually more powerful, and is usually private. Thus, it doesn’t tend to be a way in which lovers represent their shared identity to the outside world but it is still a kind of affirmation or celebration of the togetherness of the lovers.

An undeniable feature of sex is that sexual partners are just about as physically close as they can be; Nozick’s diagram of lovers ‘as two figures with the boundary line between them erased where they come together’[[411]](#footnote-411) readily applies to lovers while they are having sex. Physical closeness is hugely significant and symbolic in British society at least, as we put a high value on personal space and there is a taboo on touching people and looking intently at them. As Gregory notes, ‘failure to observe the physical separateness of the other is largely perceived either as violent or sexual’.[[412]](#footnote-412) If a stranger sits close to you on the bus and starts stroking your arm you are likely to feel afraid, angry, aroused, or perhaps some combination. In any case, you will not feel indifferent. We purposefully get physically close to people in order to show certain feelings, attitudes and desires, such as hugging someone to express comfort or sitting very close to them to express sexual desire. Therefore, allowing someone to be as physically close to you as they are in sex can be expressive of a feeling of union and emotional closeness, and it can also help to create this feeling.

It is interesting to note that when we do not want sex to symbolise emotional closeness we often engage in behaviours which show this. For example, as Julia Roberts’s character in the 1990 film *Pretty Woman* does, prostitutes might refuse to kiss punters on the lips in order to try and deal with the cognitive dissonance that comes with engaging in an act that seems to represent physical closeness with someone with whom they do not want to be emotionally close. We might compare this to our behaviour in other situations where we’re physically close to people, such as in a crowded train, but engage in behaviours to make the physical closeness non-intimate, for example avoiding eye contact and not touching. It seems that we have to engage in these kinds of behaviours because physical closeness is so readily an expression of emotional closeness.

Because of the extreme physical closeness involved in sex, as well as the fact that we typically value personal space, sex can be one of the most powerful expressions and creators of emotional closeness and unity. The first time a couple have sex is often significant to them, playing an important role in the narrative of their relationship. This might be partly because sex is seen as a physical, and thus tangible, indication of the beginning of their shared life together. The sex life of romantic lovers is, therefore, an important part of their shared world and so sex is both constitutive and an expression of the shared identity of the lovers. As Nozick writes, ‘the unitive aspects of sexual experience, two persons flowing together and intensely merging, mirror and aid the formation of the *we*’.[[413]](#footnote-413) Indeed, one reason sexual intercourse tends to be elevated above other kinds of sexual activity might be because it involves a literal conjoining of bodies and so very effectively symbolises a uniting of identities.

Sex might generally be considered more important at the beginning of a relationship because, as well as being constitutive and expressive of the ‘we’, sex can also drive its formation. Indeed, this is one of the connotations of the term ‘making love’. This is partly just because repeatedly engaging in a pleasurable activity with someone, who is partly responsible for your pleasure, is likely to forge a bond between you. Indeed, the frequent sharing of any kind of unusual and intense experience with someone often creates a bond. However, there is more to it than this: part of the value of their shared life to the lovers comes from the type of recognition and attention they get from it. As I observed in the last chapter, in romantic love we feel that the trivialities of our life, both mental and physical, gain significance because they are important to someone else whose life we also care about and find important. Good sex requires a high level of attention to the responses of one’s lover, as sexual communication is typically not explicit. A good sex partner interprets the meanings of their partner’s non-verbal cues in order to make them feel comfortable and to give them pleasure. Thus, sex can help us to develop the kind of attentiveness that is required to be a good romantic lover. It is also simply another way of attending to and appreciating one’s partner, through caring about the detail and idiosyncrasies of their body, desires and emotions. It is this kind of loving attention that explains the phenomenon of coming to love body parts of one’s beloved that one would not notice on anyone else, such as their ear-lobes or tummy-button, just because *they are theirs.*

Furthermore, although we are not always consciously aware of why we are sexually attracted to people, we are often attracted to people with whom we could ‘see ourselves’; people with whom we can imagine getting on and sharing a life. We are attracted to people who share similar ideas, values and beliefs to ours, who possess qualities that we lack but would like to have, and who have future plans that we find appealing. This is why finding out more about someone can affect the amount of sexual attraction you feel for them. For example, suppose a woman meets a man in a bar, to whom she feels very attracted. They talk for a couple of hours mostly about work and travel, and she assumes that he is someone with whom she shares many values. However, when she goes back to his house she sees copies of a right-wing newspaper and men’s magazines that she finds sexist lying about, and DVDs for films and TV programmes that she finds stupid and boring. Her attraction to him immediately dissipates, because this is no longer a man with whom she could imagine her life being intertwined, (although she might not consciously have this thought). Of course, this does not always happen; sometimes people want sex just for the sake of sex, and they don’t care about the values or morals of their sexual partner. It will depend on the context within which the sexual attraction occurs, and the values and desires of the people involved. Further, sometimes we are sexually attracted to others precisely because they are *bad* for us, or totally unlike anyone to whom we would normally be attracted. In these cases though, we are excited about the prospect of our life being different, or by the way that we are subverting norms of attraction, and our attraction is usually short-lived. In any case, there is very often a link between sexual attraction and the desire to be in a romantic relationship with someone, which includes, among other things, embarking on a joint endeavour to share a life. ‘Losing the spark’ in a relationship is often taken to be losing the sexual attraction, but it might also be a realisation that your shared life has not brought you what you had hoped it would and probably will not. Therefore, a lack of excitement for your emotional and mental togetherness can cause a lack of desire for physical closeness.

This is not to say that we can just summon up sexual attraction by deciding we want to share a life with someone. Suppose a man, Nick, has a best friend, Max, who has told him that he is in love with him. Nick cares for and gets on with Max very much, sharing many of the same interests and values, and in many ways Nick would find him the ideal life partner. However, if he has no sexual interest for Max this will override everything. A lack of sexual desire would mean either having unwanted sex or having no sex with Max. Either way, sex would not be a vehicle for or constituent of their love and Nick would know that he would wonder if he could find a better relationship elsewhere which included what he had with Max, *and* sex. He might also think that he and Max will never have the kind of closeness he wants from a romantic relationship if their relationship is not sexual, because sex creates intimacy. Thus, although sexual and emotional intimacy are interrelated, we do not seem to have complete control over them, and thus a lack of sexual attraction for or desire for emotional closeness with someone cannot be considered blameworthy.

Furthermore, a lack of sex in a relationship does not always indicate a lack of emotional closeness. If one or both of the partners cannot or does not want to have sex in general, then their lack of sex does not mean that they are not fully sharing their lives, because sex is not part of their individual lives either. In addition, a couple might have built a very secure and stable shared life together and not feel the need or desire to express this sexually anymore. Again, this does not seem problematic. On the other hand, because sex is such a powerful way of embodying, building and expressing the shared identity of the lovers, if lovers who enjoy and are capable of having sex never want sex with each other, this could indicate a lack of emotional closeness.

**4.3) Intimacy**

A distinctive and valuable feature of romantic love is the amount of emotional, psychological and physical intimacy typically involved with it. Sex is intimate, in part, just because of its physical nature: allowing someone direct access to your body, and, in particular, to the most sensitive and private parts of your body, is intimate. However, this is not all there is to it; as I described in the last chapter, intimacy requires a degree of privacy and the sharing of information or experiences that you don’t share with (many) others. In other words, it requires a degree of exclusivity: you can’t be intimate with everyone. Sex is usually a private act; it is illegal to do it in public and the desire to have sex whilst being observed is considered a fetish. People want to have sex whilst being watched, in part, because it deviates from the standard way to have sex. Furthermore, we don’t, in general, talk about sex as openly as we discuss other things. Although some people discuss sex openly with their friends, we also feel that it is within our rights to request our lovers not to discuss our sex life with anyone in order to preserve its intimacy. It would seem unreasonable, on the other hand, to request our lovers not to tell anyone about the food we eat together, because eating food is typically not intimate.[[414]](#footnote-414)

Nudity adds to the intimacy of sex and sex while naked is *ceteris paribus,* usually more intimate than sex while clothed. As Giles points out, nakedness is ‘the physical equivalent of self-disclosure’ and self-disclosure creates intimacy through sharing information about oneself that is private. He suggests that, ‘an important aspect of clothing is that it allows us to maintain a measure of control over another’s perception of us […] when we are clothed we are, to some extent, disguised and unrevealed.’[[415]](#footnote-415) This has particular significance in a society where clothes are used as a medium to convey various public personas of yourself and to help you conform to social roles. Without your clothes you show yourself in a different light, a more private light, and you may find it harder to play your regular social role. This is partly why nakedness is considered degrading: the person is not only stripped of their clothes, but also their public identity. Thus, *choosing* to be naked with someone can show that you want to share information with them that most people don’t see – the way you look without clothes on, and the way you are away from your public persona. The sexual parts of our bodies are particularly intimate because they are the most private parts and are often considered shameful even in liberal societies. Indeed, in English we often refer to them as ‘the private parts,’ whereas the French call them ‘*les parties honteuses’,* which literally translates as ‘the shameful parts’. Therefore, to allow someone to see and touch these parts of your body, can show that you trust them.

Thus, sex is partly constitutive of the intimacy that is one of the primary goods of romantic love, and it also helps to create, build and express emotional intimacy. As Bayles notes, sex ‘involves an element of giving of oneself, and one’s sexual identity is frequently a central element of one’s self-image’.[[416]](#footnote-416) Physical intimacy is frequently taken to indicate emotional intimacy, and this is one of the reasons why people feel hurt when they have sex with someone who does not call them afterwards. Because of the perceived connection between love and sex, some people assume that physical intimacy is expressive of emotional intimacy and so can feel deceived and used when they find out that it was ‘just sex’. Furthermore, emotional intimacy — combined with sexual/romantic attraction — often causes a desire for physical intimacy. A study published in 2007, which analysed the sexual activities of 6,400 18-26 year olds, found that couples who reported that they loved each other a lot were more likely to engage in oral sex and anal sex, acts which are typically perceived as being very intimate.[[417]](#footnote-417) Although there are undoubtedly a variety of factors influencing people’s decisions about which sexual activities they engage in, such as wanting to impress or please a sexual partner, it is reasonable to assume that emotional intimacy is sometimes both a cause and a consequence of physical intimacy.

Therefore, one of the reasons that sex is important in a romantic relationship is because it increases and expresses the intimacy of the relationship. Further, part of the value of a romantic relationship comes from the emotional intimacy of it. Barring impediments, a romantic relationship that never includes sex will be, *ceteris paribus,* a less intimate relationship. Nonetheless, a couple who cannot or don’t want to have sex in general will not necessarily feel that their relationship would be more intimate if it was sexual, because sexual intimacy is not part of their lives at all. Furthermore, a couple who no longer have sex might still be very intimate with each other in non-sexual ways, some of which might be quasi-sexual, such as kissing and cuddling. Sex might be more important at the beginning of a relationship because the couple are building intimacy, and sex is, in one sense, a ‘fast-track’ to intimacy.

**4.4) Vulnerability and care**

Vulnerability and care are closely related to some of the other goods of a romantic relationship. In particular, they are closely related to intimacy. They are considered together here because they are two sides of the same coin. Giles argues that romantic love involves:

‘a complex of intense desires involving the desire to be vulnerable before another person in order that one may be nurtured or cared for by that person, and, at the same time, the desire to have the other person vulnerable before oneself that one may nurture or care for that person.’[[418]](#footnote-418)

He uses the term ‘vulnerability’ here to mean, ‘psychologically or emotionally in need’ rather than its alternative meaning — ‘susceptible to injury’.[[419]](#footnote-419) We are vulnerable in romantic love because we are intimate with our partner and we desire that our love is reciprocated; the beloved has the capacity to hurt us, but also to care for us. Giles suggests that sex is another way of expressing the desire for mutual vulnerability and care because sex involves ‘a mutual baring of and caressing of and by among the most erogenously sensitive and thus, in one sense, most vulnerable areas of the body.’[[420]](#footnote-420) In sex we make ourselves physically vulnerable, in the hope of being physically nurtured, as in love we make ourselves emotionally vulnerable, in the hope of being emotionally nurtured, and so, in Giles’ words, ‘sexual desire is but one more way of wanting what love wants’.[[421]](#footnote-421)

This is an important and interesting observation regarding romantic love. Although care is a feature of all kinds of love, there is a kind of vulnerability which is essential to romantic love, but not to other kinds of love and, subsequently, there is a type of care that only a romantic lover can give. Indeed, vulnerability is sometimes discouraged within certain loving relationships. For example, a mother might hide her emotional vulnerability from her children because their relationship makes displays of vulnerability inappropriate. By contrast, a romantic lover might reasonably think that his romantic lover does not love him romantically if she does not allow herself to be vulnerable with him, or if she does not appear to want him to be vulnerable. Thus, if Matilda never displays any weakness, insecurity or anxiety to Jason, he might feel that there is something wrong with their relationship, perhaps that she does not trust him. Similarly, if she requests him not to ever show her any weakness, and does not respond kindly to him when he does, there would seem to be something amiss in their relationship. As Giles points out, this is because certain basic features of romantic love, such as trust, intimacy and self-disclosure, all require vulnerability.[[422]](#footnote-422) For example, in order for Matilda to show that she trusts Jason not to hurt her, she has to make herself vulnerable to the possibility of him hurting her. And in order to be intimate with him she has to share things with him that she shares with no-one else, or with only very few people. This makes her vulnerable to him because if he disclosed her private information to other people it could compromise her other relationships and/or public status. We might add to Giles’ list that shared identities also require vulnerability because if Jason leaves the relationship, the joint life identity that he and Matilda shared will be destroyed and so Matilda may have to rebuild part of her life and identity. Therefore, the vulnerability in romantic love is actually greater than Giles acknowledges.

Perhaps not all sex involves vulnerability and care, but a lot of sex, and particularly what we think of as loving and intimate sex, does. Indeed, one way in which we might distinguish loving sex from non-loving sex is by the amount of mutual vulnerability and care that are present in the encounter. For example, sex between two people who are fully clothed, inexpressive, and do not kiss or caress each other would typically be described as non-loving sex; it is also sex which involves little vulnerability or care. As evidence for the view that sex involves vulnerability and care, Giles points to the kinds of behaviour we adopt during sex which seem to mirror the behaviour we adopt when caring for someone who is vulnerable. He observes that:

‘Many of the acts which are typically involved in sexual pleasuring are, in other contexts, used to comfort and to show concern and care to someone who might be vulnerable. Thushugging, holding, and stroking, in addition to being forms of sexual pleasuring, are alsoused to comfort or reassure someone who is sad, frightened, or has been hurt. Similarly, kissing, sucking, or nuzzling, which are often part of love-making, are also frequently used to show care and concern.’[[423]](#footnote-423)

Furthermore, we might note that even sadomasochistic sex which does not include the types of acts Giles mentions, and may appear to be the opposite of the kind of sex he describes, can also involve vulnerability and care; indeed, it might very well involve *more* vulnerability and care. Therefore, sex provides the lovers with a space to be vulnerable with one another and also to care for each other, and this can impact on the rest of their relationship. As vulnerability and care are crucial for the intimacy and shared identity of the relationship, it is important that the lovers feel comfortable being vulnerable with each other and that they know how to care for one another. Sex can thus have supportive value in a romantic relationship, making the lovers feel more comfortable, safe and trusting towards one another. It might also be a way that the lovers communicate to each other that they want a relationship in which they look after each other that is characterised by intimacy, trust, and self-disclosure. Thus, sex partly constitutes, builds and expresses the vulnerability and care involved in a romantic relationship. Again though, sex is not the only way for a couple to be vulnerable or to care for one another, and so a romantic relationship which is not sexual will not necessarily be missing something important.

**5) Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have examined why it is that we consider sex to be an important feature of romantic love. I began by observing that we tend to see sex as an almost essential feature of romantic love and that regular sex is seen, *ceteris paribus,* as an indicator of a good relationship. I wanted an account of sex that could explain why these assumptions are so widely held and important to us. However, the account needed to take into consideration that there are romantic relationships which never include sex and that many relationships become less sexual as they progress but nonetheless remain good romantic relationships.

First, I opposed the argument that we would be better off decoupling sex from love, arguing that finding value in sex as a feature of romantic love makes sense and is compatible with there also being value in sex without love. Second, I put forward an account of the relationship between sex and love which I think can explain why we tend to have sex with people we love romantically. Sex is an important part of romantic love because it constitutes, expresses, and builds four of the most central and important tenets of a good romantic relationship: pleasure, union, intimacy and vulnerability and care. If one’s partner does not want to have sex with one, this might seem like an indication that they don’t value the relationship or want to move it forward – though this is not necessarily the case. My account does not claim that there is any absolute or necessary relationship between love and sex though, and allows for a relationship that is not sexual to be romantic. If society was organised differently and there were different norms regarding human interaction, then sex might not be a vehicle for romantic love. Thus, my account can explain why sexual intimacy sometimes leads to emotional intimacy and to the development of a romantic relationship, whilst acknowledging that this won’t always happen. This is because, although sex is an important vehicle and constituent of the four central goods of romantic relationships, it is not the only vehicle or constituent of them.

It should also be noted that this account does not moralise sex; it does not entail that there is anything wrong with having sex outside of a loving relationship, or that loving sex is more moral than casual sex. My account is based on non-moral value: the value of romantic love and the value of sex in relation to that. Therefore, it is consistent with the objections I made to moral accounts of sex and love in the introduction. In the following chapter I’ll consider the value of sexual exclusivity as part of a romantic relationship, arguing that it can enhance the value of the romantic relationship, but only if certain conditions are met. Furthermore, I’ll argue that the norm of sexual exclusivity is problematic for several reasons.

**Chapter Seven: What is the relationship between sexual exclusivity and romantic love?**

**1) Introduction**

In the previous chapter I argued that there is a relationship between sex and romantic love in that sex can be an important vehicle for four of the central goods of a romantic relationship: 1) pleasure, 2) union, 3) intimacy and 4) vulnerability and care. However, as I pointed out, we also tend to believe that it is important to be sexually exclusive[[424]](#footnote-424) in romantic relationships, and some couples think that it is more important not to have sex with anyone outside of the relationship than to have sex with each other (I will henceforth refer to sex outside of the primary relationship as ‘extra-relatal sex’). Indeed, extra-relatal sex which violates an agreement to be sexually exclusive is a major cause of relationship dissolution. This suggests that we take the agreement to be sexually exclusive very seriously. A cross-cultural study in 1989, which looked at 160 societies, found that, aside from sterility, adultery was the top cause of conjugal dissolution,[[425]](#footnote-425) and a survey of the leading 101 family lawyers in the UK carried out in 2011 reported that 25% of divorces were caused by adultery.[[426]](#footnote-426)

However, despite our apparent willing acceptance of sexual exclusivity (henceforth SE), on reflection, there is a tension in the idea of SE being a requirement of romantic love. This is because sex is generally considered to have value, and usually when we love someone we want to increase the amount of value in their lives, not restrict it. Similarly, as I have argued previously, we expect a romantic relationship to be enjoyable and add value to our lives; therefore it is odd that we would accept, and even desire, such a restriction. In addition, it is at least not obvious why sex outside of the relationship must impact on the relationship at all. If I hate techno music, it might damage our relationship if my partner insists on playing it whenever I’m around; but it seems unreasonable for me to request him not to play it when I’m not there, as long as him listening to it does not change the way he acts with me or the amount of time and energy he has for me. Similarly, looked at in one way, it might seem unfair for me to expect him not to have sex with others when I’m not around, as long as it does not change his behaviour towards me. In order to avoid these tensions, the practice of SE must add more value to our lives and romantic relationships than it detracts.

In this chapter I will argue that SE can have supportive value in a romantic relationship, and can act as a symbol for, and expression of, the exclusive shared identity that is distinctive to romantic love, as well as partly constituting and building it. In order to make this argument, I will examine four possible justifications for SE: 1) romantic relationships are necessarily sexually exclusive; 2) SE protects the relationship; 3) jealousy gives us reason to be sexually exclusive; 4) extra-relatal sex denies the significance of sex within the relationship. I will argue that none of them succeeds, but that there are things to be learned from them that will help us to develop a more plausible case for SE, which I argue can help the lovers to reaffirm the value of their exclusive shared identity and life by marking their relationship out as distinct from other relationships.

However, I will suggest that there are problems with SE being the hegemonic norm that it is, and thus that we should at least acknowledge that SE is not a necessary feature of romantic love, nor is it *ceteris paribus* more moral to be sexually exclusive. Firstly, the value of SE is diminished by it being such a dominant social norm. This is because we do not freely and deliberately choose SE or consider its value. Secondly, the norm of SE gives the idea of faithfulness the wrong focus. We sometimes equate SE with romantic love and so mistakenly assume that adultery necessarily entails a loss or lack of love. Furthermore, we might think that we are being a good romantic partner simply because we are sexually faithful and thus fail to demonstrate commitment to the relationship in other ways.

Overall, I will argue that, for some relationships, choosing to be sexually exclusive is a sensible decision that adds value to the relationship. However, SE is not a necessary feature of romantic love and, furthermore, placing too much emphasis on it can obscure the reasons for being sexually exclusive in the first place. Thus, I suggest that we ought to reconceive the idea of ‘fidelity’ to mean being faithful to the relationship; doing what we can to preserve its value. This would mean that one could also be unfaithful by, for example, not giving enough time to the relationship or not supporting your partner during a time of distress.

**2) Four unsuccessful justifications for SE**

In Chapter One I considered two kinds of moral argument in favour of monogamy. The first, versions of which are put forward by Kant and Scruton, was that to have sex outside a monogamous, committed relationship is to objectify another. The second was the ‘new natural law’ style argument, of which Finnis and Geach are proponents, that sex outside monogamous, heterosexual, procreative marriage is morally wrong because this kind of marriage is a fundamental human good that promotes human flourishing and sex outside it denies this fact. These were arguments against any sex outside a monogamous relationship or marriage, not just against non-monogamous relationships. I will not discuss these accounts again as I have already presented objections against them, and am interested here in a slightly different question, which is whether it is intelligible for a romantic couple to be sexually exclusive because they love each other. I will consider four possible ways that they might do this, which I don’t think work very well: 1) Romantic relationships are necessarily sexually exclusive; 2) SE protects the relationship; 3) SE protects against jealousy; 4) Extra-relatal sex denies the significance of sex in the relationship. Though there are lessons to be learned from these arguments, I will argue that none of them are strong enough to justify making SE a requirement of a romantic relationship.

**2.1) Romantic relationships are necessarily sexually exclusive**

One view of romantic love is that it is necessarily sexually exclusive, and thus, it does not make sense to speak of having to justify SE in a romantic relationship, since to be in such a relationship just does mean to be sexually exclusive. This differs from the new natural law arguments because it makes no claims about the value of such a relationship and does not comment about casual sex in general, only sex had outside one’s own primary relationship. Michael Wreen argues that sexual exclusivity is a defining feature of a marriage, and so marriage entails a policy of sexual exclusivity.[[427]](#footnote-427) Adultery involves violating this policy and is thus wrong ‘even if the spouse of an adulterer knows of and condones his/her spouse’s adulterous behaviour. The fact that they are married is sufficient for such behaviour to be wrong.’[[428]](#footnote-428) Although Wreen’s argument focuses specifically on marriage, this sort of claim could be extended to non-married long-term romantic relationships too. Therefore, for the purposes of this discussion, I will apply his account to all committed romantic relationships.

To clarify this argument by way of an analogy: we might say that two people cheating at a game of chess are still cheating, even if they both agree at the beginning of the game that that is what they will do and if they do it openly. Adultery, even if consensual, is thus wrong because it represents a kind of irrationality, the adoption of inconsistent policies; it is a ‘contradiction in conception [...] an attack of the conceptual cornerstones of marriage itself’.[[429]](#footnote-429) Compare to the chess analogy: agreeing to cheat at chess entails both agreeing to play chess but also not to play chess and is thus an irrational choice. However, Wreen argues that adultery is wrong not only because it is irrational but ‘because the contradiction [in conception] essentially involves a social, as well as personal, commitment to a second party.’[[430]](#footnote-430) He does not expand on this point, but I assume he means that marriage involves a commitment to be sexually exclusive and it is wrong to break our commitments. It is difficult to see how this claim applies to couples who haven’t made this commitment though.

Wreen’s argument depends on the acceptance of two controversial assumptions: (1) that there are pre-defined, non-negotiable rules to a romantic relationship, of which SE is one; (2) the violation of the rule of SE is wrong *even if* done with the consent of the other partner. He explicitly states that he is not concerned with the legal definition of marriage, but with the ‘common sense definition’ which he then goes on to describe as including SE.[[431]](#footnote-431) However, he does not explain how we are to decide upon the ‘common sense definition’ or offer sufficient evidence or argumentation to convince that his is theright one. Although we can identify some core characteristics of a romantic relationship, it is not clear that SE is one of these and, even if it is, that does not make it a necessary component. To claim that romantic relationships require SE, without justifying why, is simply to beg the question.

The second assumption relies on the first because if SE is not a pre-defined feature of romantic love, it can’t be wrong to not be sexually exclusive. However, we could still question the second assumption even if we accepted the first. One way of doing this is to observe that, if SE is essential for marriage or romantic love, then the couple who are not sexually exclusive are simply not married or in a romantic relationship, and so do not commit a wrong. Wreen considers the possibility that the couple who agree to be in an open relationship are only legally married but not morally married. However, he responds that, as monogamous marriage is so important to humans, ‘it is doubtful that such a commitment could be so easily banished’.[[432]](#footnote-432) Presumably he means that it is very difficult to not make the promise to be sexually exclusive if one marries, but this does not tell us how we should respond to couples who do not, in fact, make such a promise.

Furthermore, even if SE is necessary for the ‘common sense’ definitions of marriage and romantic love, it is not clear why we cannot just change the rules or develop alternative concepts of relationships. It might be objected that the concepts of marriage and romantic love would be damaged by people changing the rules, but this will not matter to those people who do not value SE or who find it irrelevant to the value of romantic love. Wreen does consider the possibility of a person who rejects the institution of marriage altogether. He suggests that for these people, there will be ‘nothing wrong with adultery as such’. However, he then goes on to say: ‘rebels of the above sort, though, are like Cartesian madmen, more the product of the philosopher’s imagination than the stuff of flesh and blood people.’[[433]](#footnote-433) It doesn’t take much argument to show that this is just plain wrong. There are many people who reject the idea of marriage, some of whom practise polyamory,[[434]](#footnote-434) and there are even more people who secretly reject SE, by, perhaps, committing adultery or going along with SE but not really seeing why. People also reject the idea of being in a romantic relationship altogether by remaining single and perhaps engaging in casual sex only. Moreover, we should question whether the players cheating at chess are actually doing anything morally wrong by simply not playing by the rules, particularly if they have a more enjoyable experience than they would have done if they had not cheated. At worst, it seems like they have made a prudential error if their game would have been more satisfying overall had they stuck to the rules.

Furthermore, even if we accept the argument that there are pre-defined, non-negotiable rules to a romantic relationship, of which SE is one, and that we do something wrong by breaking them, this does not entail that people have to have relationships which fulfil Wreen’s criteria. If the rules of chess are non-negotiable, the people who do not want to play by the rules can avoid inconsistency by just saying that they are playing a different game called ‘schess’, not chess. Similarly, we could have a concept of a romantic relationship which was necessarily sexually exclusive, but that does not mean that anyone has to have such a relationship. Basketball might necessarily entail that players do not run with the ball, but netball players are not breaking the rules of basketball by running with the ball; they’re just playing a different game. If Wreen says that people cannot call their non-exclusive relationships romantic because this is ‘against common sense’, they can just bite the bullet and say they’re ‘schomantic’ relationships instead. Furthermore, nothing in Wreen’s paper gives us reason to believe that romantic relationship are more fulfilling than schomantic relationships. Schomantic relationships might even be more valuable and significant kinds of relationships than romantic relationships, just as schess might be more challenging and fun than chess. In order for Wreen’s argument to have any normative implications he needs to show that a sexually exclusive romantic relationship is more valuable than a schomantic relationship. By merely highlighting a common-sense understanding of what the practice involves, without justifying it as the way in which it should be practised, he is completely missing the mark. In what follows, I will consider three ways that SE might add more value to a romantic relationship than it detracts.

**2.2) Protecting the relationship**

One argument in favour of SE is that it is a good policy to adopt for the practical benefit of protecting the relationship. This kind of argument differs to Wreen’s because, while Wreen claims that romantic relationships are necessarily exclusive, proponents of this argument would accept that they might not be, but suggest that SE is the best way to protect them from ending. They presuppose that romantic relationships are valuable but fragile, and contend that it is over-idealistic to think that relationships do not need protecting, which will sometimes require sacrifice. Indeed, people often go to great lengths to maintain their romantic relationships and, as long as the relationships are worth it, we usually see this as positive. ‘Trading-up’ is a significant problem for romantic love, and if people were not sexually exclusive they might move between partners more readily. Limiting your choice of sexual partners to one gives you less opportunity and temptation to trade-up and thus might make you more likely to be satisfied with the relationship in which you are in. Even if extra-relatal sex does not lead to trading-up, it is reasonable to worry that it will lead to an extra-relatal affair, which will mean a diversion of time and resources to the affair and away from the primary relationship. Therefore, SE might be a rational protective measure against this possibility.

However, the need to protect a valuable relationship does not adequately justify restricting all sex, and only sex, to the relationship; instead, the justification seems to be both under-inclusive and over-inclusive. It is under-inclusive because it does not justify restricting extra-relatal sex which is of the sort that it has no chance of leading to an affair or to trading-up, such as one-off sex with a stranger whilst on holiday. While it is obvious that some things will damage the relationship, such as one partner permanently moving to another country, or having a protracted affair that involves a significant diversion of attention from one’s partner to someone else, it is less clear that one or a few isolated instances of extra-relatal sex would damage the relationship. Indeed, they could even improve it in some ways. As Mike Martin points out, sometimes extra-relatal sex can boost the adulterer’s self-esteem, making them feel liberated and transformed. He quotes a woman who after an affair stated: ‘it’s given me a whole new way of looking at myself…I felt attractive again. I hadn’t felt that way in years, really. It made me very, very confident.’[[435]](#footnote-435) Of course, feeling like this might make the adulterer realise that her current relationship is lacking insofar as it doesn’t make her feel this way and subsequently leave it. However, it is also possible that a boost in confidence could result in renewed effort and energy going back into the primary relationship which would benefit both partners.

In addition, this justification is also over-inclusive: it seems to justify restricting one’s partner from doing non-sexual things which are likely to lead to affairs or to them trading-up, such as beginning meaningful friendships with people to whom they might develop an attraction, or taking on a job where they are likely to meet people with whom they could have fulfilling romantic relationships. Indeed, we do take exclusivity more broadly than just SE. For example, Jason might see it as a betrayal if Matilda walked down the street holding hands with her colleague, Brian, or if she went for a candlelit meal with Brian at the restaurant she and Jason always eat at together. Nonetheless, the objection remains that, if what we really care about is protecting the relationship from the possibility of our partner trading up or beginning a meaningful affair, it seems that we should care more about them beginning friendships with others to whom they would be likely to be attracted, rather than them having a casual one-night-stand. Indeed, some couples will try to restrict each other from beginning such friendships, but this seems less reasonable, and is less common, than restricting each other from having extra-relatal sex. It might be suggested that this is because extra-relatal sex is much easier to give up than friendship, and friendship with others must necessarily be pursued in order to attain distinct values which one can’t get in one’s current relationship. Nonetheless, Jason might be happy for Matilda to have many close friendships as long as they are not attractive men, yet his request still seems unreasonable. Furthermore, it seems unreasonable even if she does not mind giving up friendship. In any case, why should we draw the line between what is reasonable and unreasonable to expect one’s partner to give up at sex? Some people will find it very hard to give up extra-relatal sex, feeling that they need sex with others to attain value they can’t get in their current relationship. This might be particularly true if the couple rarely have sex with each other.

Finally, it should be noted that SE might actually be, at times, a contributing factor to people trading-up and ending relationships: they might leave their partner simply because they are dissatisfied sexually in their relationship, but were they able to have sex outside of the relationship they would stay in it. Thus, SE is not a definite protective measure for romantic love, and it is not clear that relationships need protecting against all and only extra-relatal sex. Nevertheless, there does seem to be something in the idea that romantic relationships need certain protective measures in place. It is true that they are fragile and require sacrifice; thus some measure of SE might be sensible for this reason. However, we need to say more about the relationship between love and sex to explain why SE can be a reasonable and sensible protective strategy. Thus, although I am rejecting this account as it is, there is something to be preserved in it; I return to this in Section 3.

**2.3) Jealousy**

If we think about our partners having sex with other people we usually imagine ourselves feeling jealous. In addition, people may not, themselves, have extra-relatal sex because they do not want to make their partner jealous. Scruton argues that we ought to be sexually exclusive in order to avoid jealousy: ‘because jealousy is one of the greatest psychical catastrophes, involving the possible ruin of both partners, [sexual morality] must forestall and eliminate jealousy. It is in the deepest human interest, therefore, that we form the habit of fidelity’.[[436]](#footnote-436) It is true that jealousy is a powerful emotion, and it seems to be in our interest to avoid it if possible. It is the ‘green ey’d monster’[[437]](#footnote-437) that can destroy relationships and take over lives. However, we do not seem to want to rid ourselves of it entirely because we also see it as a sign of love; Peter Goldie describes it as: ‘the price that has to be paid for there to be a certain sort of love from a certain sort of person’.[[438]](#footnote-438) Jerome Neu agrees, arguing that: ‘if a person does not feel jealous, [when it is rational to do so] or is incapable of feeling jealous, we tend to suspect that they do not really care’.[[439]](#footnote-439) Not being jealous of your beloved having sexual or intimate relations with someone else might be seen as an indication that you do not love them. In addition, sometimes we first realise that we have romantic feelings for someone when we feel jealous about them being with someone else. Jealousy might be, in part, a consequence of seeing one’s beloved as a form of property,[[440]](#footnote-440) but Neu argues that jealousy is not an immoral emotion. Rather, he argues that fear of loss of affections is at the heart of jealousy, and, as we all need to be loved, we all have a propensity for jealousy.[[441]](#footnote-441) Jeffrie Murphy adds to Neu’s account, pointing out that jealousy is not only about fear of loss of love, for we do not feel jealous when we learn that we are going to lose our beloved to terminal cancer. Rather, the idea of a rival is central to jealousy: we fear the loss of our beloved *to someone else.* Thus, Murphy argues, jealousy must be understood as part of a competition-based (though not necessarily property-based) framework of human intimacy and love, and this might explain the shame and humiliation that is often felt by the person who has been cheated on.[[442]](#footnote-442)

If romantic love is as significant as I have argued it is, and if there is a relationship between love and sex, then it does seem reasonable to worry that at least some extra-relatal sex will lead to a loss of love. A partner having sex with someone else can make us fear that they love, or will grow to love, the other person and that this will entail that they have less love and affection available for us. Nonetheless, justifying jealousy is not as simple as saying that extra-relatal sex will lead to a loss of love. As discussed above, some extra-relatal sex has no possibility of leading to love; such as a person having sex on holiday with someone whose name they don’t even recall. Indeed, extra-relatal sex is far from always an indication of a lack or loss of love; there can be many reasons for it, such as seeking sexual or emotional fulfilment, needing an ego boost, or simply feeling sexually attracted to another person. Eric Anderson carried out a study in 2010 where he interviewed 40 undergraduate males. He found that 26 of them had cheated on a girlfriend of three months of more but none of them did so in preparation to break up with, or because they did not love their partners.[[443]](#footnote-443) Anderson claims that the reason they cheated was because they were ‘romantically satisfied but sexually unsatisfied,’ and suggests that, in a way, these men cheated *because* they love their partners but are too afraid to lose them to be honest about their desire for recreational sex with other women.[[444]](#footnote-444) This inference is contentious, but it seems true that the link between extra-relatal sex and lack or loss of love is far from obvious. What’s more, even if we know for sure that our partner still loves us just as much as before the extra-relatal sex, and wants to remain with us indefinitely, we might still feel jealous. Thus, it seems that jealousy is not always about a fear of a loss of love, to a rival or otherwise. This does not necessarily make jealousy unjustified, but it does show that we cannot justify all sexual jealousy by claiming it is a reasonable response to the fear of a loss of love.

Furthermore, jealousy is frequently unreasonable and thus we oughtn’t to take it as a given that we should alter our behaviour to help our partners avoid it. If Jason gets jealous every time Matilda talks to men, she should not, thereby, promise never to speak to a man again. This is because Jason’s jealousy is unjustified and so, even if he feels that he can’t help it and Matilda does not mind giving up speaking to other men, it would still be better for them both if Jason tried to overcome his jealousy. Similarly, if your partner is jealous of your charity work, or the amount of attention you give to your children, the right thing to do would probably be to continue as you are doing, but try to help them get over their jealousy. It is because sexual jealousy is so normalised that the burden of proof is almost always on the person who does not want to be sexually exclusive rather than on the jealous person to justify their jealousy. Because the default setting for a romantic relationship is for it to be sexually exclusive, the jealous person is almost always accommodated without having to consider or explain their reasons for being jealous; and we tend to think it is immature or unreasonable to prioritise your sexual freedom over your partner’s sexual jealousy. However, as jealousy is not always a legitimate reason to attempt to alter someone else’s behaviour, if we are to use it to restrict our partners from having extra-relatal sex, we need to be able to explain why it is reasonable in this case.

Another potential way of justifying sexual jealousy is to argue that it is inescapable, just a brute response to certain situations. David Buss argues that sexual jealousy is a natural and unavoidable emotion: ‘cultures in tropical paradises that are entirely free of jealousy exist only in the romantic minds of optimistic anthropologists and in fact have never been found.’[[445]](#footnote-445) However, he also argues that, though the sexes are equally jealous, men are more sexually jealous whereas women are more emotionally jealous.[[446]](#footnote-446) If this is true, then jealousy would justify a relationship arrangement in which the woman was sexually faithful, but emotionally unfaithful, and the man was emotionally faithful, but sexually unfaithful, which does not fit our current paradigm of a romantic relationship. Moreover, if this gender difference is real, then perhaps women are getting a raw deal and emotional fidelity ought to be taken as seriously as sexual fidelity. I am not going to comment on the accuracy of these claims, as they are beyond the remit of this thesis. Nonetheless, it does seem clear that, whether or not we are biologically predisposed to feel sexual jealousy, it is not something that we all possess to the same degree and are all stuck with. There are cross-cultural differences between the types of behaviour that evoke jealousy and in the degree to which jealousy tends to be felt, which suggests that social norms are at least partly responsible for jealousy.[[447]](#footnote-447) Many polyamorists try to master jealousy by cultivating compersion, ‘a state in which you derive pleasure from seeing your partner with their other lover(s)’[[448]](#footnote-448), rather than trying to master their desire for sexual and emotional relationships with others. This approach, if it works, does seem, at least *prima facie,* more conducive to the good life: these people get to have sex outside of their relationship andnot feel jealous when their partner does so; whereas those who have committed to SE do not have sex outside of their relationship andfeel jealous at the thought of their partner doing so.

Indeed, we do think that we should try to deal with jealousy in friendships and that it is possible to do so. For example, Elizabeth Emens observes that:

‘Jealousy of a friend’s other friends is generally considered a problem for the one who is jealous, who should thus overcome the jealousy. By contrast, jealousy of a lover’s other lovers is generally considered a problem for the one who inspires the jealousy, who should overcome the impulse to be unfaithful to the lover.’[[449]](#footnote-449)

If sexual jealousy is different from jealousy within friendships it must be because of the distinctiveness of romantic love and its relationship with sex, and so this will be the ultimate justification for SE, not the jealousy *per se*. Furthermore, even if we have a natural propensity towards sexual jealousy, it is likely that it has such great force, at least in part, *because* of the hegemonic norm of SE and thus justifying the norm through jealousy is circular.

Nonetheless, if I am right that a significant source of value in romantic love derives from its exclusivity, then it may not be possible to have a romantic relationship in which jealousy was not at least lurking in the background. Whilst I think that Neu and Murphy accurately describe what jealousy is about in some cases, jealousy is not always about a fear of a *loss* of love; sometimes it might be about a fear of a change to the nature of love. Even if we know that our partner will continue to love us just as much as before, we might still feel jealous because the love will be different in that it will no longer be exclusive. Part of the distinct value of romantic love lies in its exclusivity and the sense of recognition and self-worth we get from exclusive love (see Chapter Five). If your partner begins to love another, whether or not they still love you, the love will no longer be distinct in its exclusivity; thus its nature will change and it may lose some of its special value. Thus, if exclusivity is important to romantic love then it is reasonable to be jealous when exclusivity is threatened. However, for sexual jealousy to be justified, it needs to make reference to the relationship as a whole and the place of sex within it. Later on, I’ll discuss some of the ways in which SE can support a relationship in order to show that sexual jealousy can be justified in some cases where the extra-relatal sex will not lead to a loss of love.

To sum up: jealousy is often the proximate cause of a decision to be sexually exclusive and does give us a reason to be sexually exclusive because it is such a powerful emotion that is difficult to avoid and, where it is caused by a reasonable fear of a loss of love, is appropriate. However, sexual jealousy that is not produced by a reasonable belief that your partner might leave you or stop loving you does not seem to be a strong enough reason in itself to require them not to have extra-relatal sex. We need to be able to explain why it is reasonable to require your partner not to have sex with anyone else because it will make you jealous, but unreasonable to require them not to talk to anyone else because it will make you jealous. Such an explanation would need to refer to the distinctiveness of sex. In the next section, I will consider an argument for the significance of sex in a relationship, which isn’t wholly successful, before putting forward my own justification for SE.

**2.4) Extra-relatal sex as a denial of the value of sex in the relationship**

In this section I will discuss Fiona Woollard and Bryan Weaver’s claim that the requirement of SE is justified if both partners see sex as being tied to emotional intimacy in general, and if they decide to limit their relationships of erotic love to one. I will object to this argument on the ground that it relies on the contentious premise that it is reasonable to ascribe emotional significance to *all* sex. Nonetheless, there is something to be preserved in the claim that SE might be justified because of the significance of sex within a romantic relationship, just not quite in the way that they frame it.

Woollard and Weaver identify two links in the ‘monogamy chain’: ‘sex is restricted to relationships of erotic love and erotic love is restricted to a single relationship.’[[450]](#footnote-450) Therefore, their justification for monogamy comes in two stages. The first stage is that:

‘If spouses see sex in general as connected to emotional intimacy they will attach significance to all sex acts. In this case sex without emotional intimacy will seem like a betrayal; the partner’s behaviour ignores the tie between sex and emotional intimacy and is thus seen as a denial of the significance of the sex in the relationship. In this case there is a strong reason to restrict sex to relationships of erotic love.’[[451]](#footnote-451)

Thus, if the couple both see sex as significant in general, then they will reasonably be hurt if one partner has insignificant sex, because it will deny the importance of the sex they have in their relationship. The second stage of the justification is that the partners have reason to restrict the number of relationships of erotic love they have to one if this relationship fulfils their needs for erotic love and companionship. Woollard and Weaver suggest that the substantial amount of time, resources and investment that must be put into a romantic relationship mean that most people will not be able to sustain more than one such relationship, but some people will require more than one romantic relationship for a well-rounded life. For these people, it will not make sense to restrict their romantic relationships to one.[[452]](#footnote-452) Further, if the couple see only certain sexual acts that are similar to those they have together as being emotionally significant then they might adopt a policy of partial exclusivity, restricting only those acts they consider emotionally significant to relationships of erotic love. If they see only the sex they have together as emotionally significant then, while Woollard and Weaver stop short at saying they should not be monogamous, they do observe that ‘this way of seeing sex as significant is compatible with non-monogamy’.[[453]](#footnote-453)

What is compelling about Woollard and Weaver’s account is that they appreciate that a justification for monogamy will have to rest on the significance of sex, and that it will depend on the way that the lovers themselves view sex. However, Woollard and Weaver observe that their justification for monogamy relies on it being reasonable to attach emotional significance to all sex,[[454]](#footnote-454) and I think this is contentious. They argue that sex is likely to forge a bond between the couple and build emotional intimacy because it is intensely pleasurable and its pleasure is created by the interaction of the couple. This is true, but Woollard and Weaver also claim – rightly – that sex is neither necessary nor sufficient for emotional intimacy.[[455]](#footnote-455) Furthermore, they acknowledge, again rightly, that there are different ways of conceiving of sex. If this is true then it seems unreasonable to attach a single meaning to sex and so the fact that one or both partners does this does not provide a good justification for SE. Suppose Jason and Matilda both have very emotionally significant sex and so develop the belief that all sex is emotionally significant. They thus refuse to have sex with anyone else because they assume that doing so would entail they loved the other person and they do not want any additional relationships of erotic love. However, one night Matilda has drunken meaningless sex with Brian and realises that sex can have different meanings as she still finds the sex she has with Jason to be emotionally significant. Jason might be reasonably hurt for many reasons at her transgression here, but it would be unreasonable of him to insist that her extra-relatal sex with Brian entails either that she loves Brian or that the sex she has with Jason means nothing. Furthermore, despite Matilda’s realisation, she might still find SE valuable.

Unless there is a very strong connection between love and sex, such that sex always *in fact* leads to or expresses love, then it seems irrational to ascribe a single meaning to all instances of sex. Even if you believe that sex *should* have a single meaning, it is clear that it does not *in fact* have just one meaning. Therefore, having insignificant extra-relatal sex does not automatically imply that one does not see the sex one has with one’s partner as emotionally significant. Similarly, using the pet names ‘JJ’ and ‘Mattie’ for each other might forge a bond between Jason and Matilda and these pet names might take on emotional significance for both of them. Nonetheless, if Matilda notices that her cousin’s initials both begin with J and begins calling her JJ occasionally, this does not automatically deny the significance of the name when she uses it with Jason. Of course, it is reasonable to worry that your partner will attach emotional significance to sex with others, but it also seems reasonable for them to expect you to trust them when they tell you this is not the case.

Therefore, Woollard and Weaver are right to use the significance of sex to justify SE. We have to be able to explain why sex is important and distinctive from other activities in order to justify requiring our beloveds to not have sex with anyone but us. If we can’t do this then it becomes difficult to explain why a restriction on sex is acceptable but not a restriction on speaking to other people. However, by relying on it being reasonable to attach a single meaning to *all* sex because of the significance of the sex in your relationship, Woollard and Weaver’s justification for monogamy is unpersuasive. Although sex very often is connected with love for the reasons outlined in the previous chapter, it would be unreasonable for a person to refuse to accept that their partner was psychologically incapable of having emotionally significant sex with them *and* of having emotionally insignificant sex with other people. Thus, a justification for SE will need to rely instead on what the extra-relatal sex *in fact* does to the relationship. In the next section I’ll explain why extra-relatal sex can be damaging to a romantic relationship.

**3) A better justification: adding value to the relationship**

Thus far, I have rejected four ways of justifying SE; however, this does not mean that SE is unjustifiable or irrational. Although SE is *prima facie* a restriction on one’s freedom, very many people either do not experience it as such, or they find it a restriction worth making. We need to be able to explain why this is unless we want to dismiss the value these people find in SE as irrational. In order to develop such an account I will begin with a list of the points we have learned from the four potential justifications discussed above:

1. Stating that a romantic relationship is necessarily sexually exclusive does not give us any reason to want to be in such a relationship. A justification for SE needs to show that SE is a sensible way of attaining a particular kind of value.
2. It seems fair to say that romantic relationships require some protective measures to be put in place in order to maintain them. However, this justification does not justify restricting all and only sex to the relationship.
3. The proximate reason for a decision to be SE is often jealousy. However, jealousy needs justification, as it can be unreasonable. Such justification will need to be derived from the significance of sex and its relationship to romantic love.
4. Taking points 1-3 into consideration shows that if there is to be a justification at all for SE then it will need to be derived from the significance of sex. However, SE cannot be justified on the grounds that an instance of extra-relatal sex would indicate either that the adulterous partner finds sex within the relationship insignificant, or that they are in love with the person with whom they have had extra-relatal sex.

In this section I will try to build up a plausible case for SE, taking into account these considerations. I will argue that SE can support and add value to a relationship of romantic love, and thus that sexual jealousy can be reasonable and appropriate due to a fear, not only of loss of love, but of a change to the nature of the relationship. If a couple see SE as adding value to their relationship, then extra-relatal sex would devalue the relationship. In what follows, I will discuss how SE might add to the value of a romantic relationship. I will suggest that SE can help to create and sustain the shared identity of the couple, thus defining the relationship as a romantic one by affirming its value and demarcating it from other friendships. A couple could choose an activity other than sex to have this function, but sex is not an arbitrary choice. Rather, it makes sense to choose sex as an exclusive shared activity because of the connection between love and sex, as described in the previous chapter. Nonetheless, SE is by no means necessary for a romantic relationship to have value.

**3.1) How does SE add value to the romantic relationship?**

As I argued in Chapter Six, sex can be a vehicle for romantic love, building, constituting and expressing four of the central goods of romantic love: pleasure, union, intimacy, and vulnerability and care. If sex is exclusive then it might be an even more effective vehicle for these goods. For some couples, sex will be more pleasurable the more exclusive it is, perhaps because they will make more effort sexually with each other and/or feel more relaxed and confident knowing they are not being compared to others. In addition, sex might be a more powerful way of expressing and affirming the union of the lovers if it is exclusive, because it will be an activity that helps to delineate the boundaries of the ‘we’. Similarly, since intimacy usually requires sharing information and experiences that you share with no-one or very few people, sex will be more intimate the more exclusive it is. Finally, if a couple have sex exclusively, their sex may involve greater vulnerability and care. They might feel more comfortable being vulnerable with each other if they know that they are not being compared to anyone else; and if they have sex only with each other then they might pay each other the kind of detailed attention required to care for each other sexually.

Therefore, if a couple have sex exclusively, their sex might be a more effective vehicle for their love and union. However, this will, of course, not always be the case; sex can become more perfunctory as a relationship progresses. Nevertheless, even if the sex is somewhat mundane, SE provides the lovers with a space that belongs to them, together, and to them only. Their sexual world becomes a world with its own norms, history, rules and morals, which only they inhabit. Moreover, it is a world that they have created. This is valuable in itself, as a way of celebrating the uniqueness of the relationship and its intrinsic value, but it also has supportive value, providing the lovers with a space to act out and affirm the value and nature of their relationship. It is a place they can return to when they have been feeling distant from one another to bring them closer emotionally. Of course, they can still feel this way if they do not have sex exclusively with one another – sex might simply be particularly special to them because they love each other. My claim is only a rather weak one, that there can be something intelligible in the decision to share sex exclusively as a way to affirm the uniqueness of the relationship.

Furthermore, sharing sex exclusively can be one way of making the relationship distinct and special (though it is not the only way to do this). Having this exclusive, private sexual space means that the lovers can clearly demarcate their relationship from other relationships. It tends to be very important to people to distinguish their romantic relationship from their friendships because, as I discussed in Chapter Five, although the relationships share many features, there are different rights and obligations associated with each type. Therefore, it is important for us to know where we stand, so that we can know what to reasonably expect from a relationship and what will be expected from us. Furthermore, if the relationship is distinctly valuable, it might be important for the lovers to do something that demonstrates that they recognise its uniqueness. In addition to simply giving different relationship types different names, lovers tend to *show* that their relationship is distinct and important through various actions that are partly symbolic, but also which build, affirm and celebrate the shared identity of the lovers, their ‘we-ness’. For example, they might hold hands when walking down the road, arrive at and leave social events together and sleep, eat and have sex together.[[456]](#footnote-456) If they share their identity exclusively then it will be important for the lovers to do some things exclusively in order to affirm this feature of their relationship. Committing to sharing an activity exclusively can be a clear way to show that the relationship is distinct and special.[[457]](#footnote-457) It is important to do this because relationships are fragile and can be unpredictable; thus, having something consistent and tangible to help define the nature of your relationship can help to maintain it.

Sex is an obvious candidate for an activity to be shared exclusively because of its strong connection with romantic love and intimacy, as described in the previous chapter. Of course, sex tends not to be the only activity that lovers share exclusively, but many of the other activities they do exclusively may be quasi-sexual, such as sharing a bed, holding hands, kissing and being naked together. If your lover does these kinds of activities with another person, even if they do not love the other person, you might feel that the exclusivity, and thus the uniqueness, of your relationship has been devalued. This is because these activities represent, express and also partly constitute the exclusivity and specialness of your relationship. Making the activities no longer exclusive thus makes the relationship less exclusive which can, in turn, make it less valuable.

This account thus explains why it might be reasonable to be jealous of your partner having sex with someone else even if you do not fear that you will lose them. Extra-relatal sex does undermine the sex had in the relationship, but not by being an indication that the couple’s sex lacks emotional significance. Rather, it devalues the sex by stopping it from being an expression and symbol of the exclusivity of the relationship. Furthermore, this account explains why it is justifiable to be hurt by your partner not only having sex with another person, but also doing the kinds of non-sexual acts that you do exclusively to mark out your relationship as distinct, (many of which are culturally contingent) such as signing Christmas cards together. Indeed, for your partner to sign all of their Christmas cards with someone other than you could potentially feel like as much of a betrayal (if not more) as them having sex with someone else. As I argued in Chapter Five, a significant part of the distinct value of a romantic relationship comes from its high level of relationship exclusivity. Because the relationship is exclusive, the kind of recognition you receive from your partner makes you feel that your life is meaningful and significant, and that your unique value as a person is affirmed. Thus, for your partner to do the activities you do exclusively with another person can feel like they no longer value your relationship, or you, in the same way. It also just makes the relationship less exclusive, since its exclusivity is constituted by exclusive activities. This is why it can feel like we have lost something irretrievable when a partner has extra-relatal sex.

**3.2) Limits to this justification**

Justifying SE on the grounds that it contributes to the value of the relationship works only if the couple have sex with each other. If they are not having sex then their exclusive sex cannot be a way of marking out their relationship as distinct or of affirming their unique shared identity. However, if they never have sex with each other because both of them are asexual or physically unable to have sex this is not a problem since SE will not be of significance to them as extra-relatal sex is not a possibility. Further, they might decide upon another activity to do exclusively to mark out their relationship and affirm its value. For example, they might agree to never sleep in the same bed with anyone else. This might also be the case if only one of them is asexual or physically unable to have sex – they might decide that the other one can have extra-relatal sex, but agree on some other activity they will share exclusively. This lends support to my account by showing that it is not SE *per se* that is important to romantic love, but sharing an important activity exclusively as a way of demarcating the relationship from others and recognising and affirming its significance.

However, sometimes couples are able to have sex, and desire to do so, but are no longer attracted to one another, though they once were. In these situations it will be harder to justify the requirement of SE and, indeed, some couples might make their relationships open sexually. Nonetheless, my account does not commit me to saying that if they do decide to continue to be sexually exclusive they are acting irrationally. The stakes are often very high with long-term relationships; a couple might have children and property together as well as being deeply in love. They might also believe that, as they no longer have sex with each other, they are even more prone to attaching emotional significance to sex and thus extra-relatal sex poses more of a threat to the relationship and is simply not worth the risk. Nonetheless, if sex is very important to one or both of them then it might be too difficult for them to maintain the policy of no sex outside the relationship if they are not having sex together. Taking more time to consider our reasons for being sexually exclusive, and indeed, realising that SE is a choice, can make it easier to recognise when SE is not the best policy.

Another limit to my justification is that the value that SE adds to the relationship needs to be balanced with the value of sexual freedom that gets taken away from the lovers. For some people, limiting sex will severely impinge on their life but we do not tend to take this seriously, but rather view them as silly, selfish or immature. This is partly because, as a society, we still tend to value chastity and SE over promiscuity and continue to view sex with a degree of suspicion. The new-natural law arguments presented in Chapter One are to the far end of the spectrum of this view. However, having sex with different people can be life-enriching. Sex can be fun, pleasurable and can make one feel attractive and important. In addition, it can be, for some people, a ‘fast-track’ into an intimate friendship with another; once two people have bared themselves physically they might find it easier to be emotionally open with each other. Frederick Elliston argues that promiscuity can ‘engage one’s “higher faculties” of reason, judgment and good taste’[[458]](#footnote-458) and points out that ‘in many areas, such as clothing, vocation, and recreation, the need for experimentation and diversity is recognised and conceded’,[[459]](#footnote-459) so it is strange that we do not recognise this need in relation to sex. Therefore, it is important to remember that, although SE can add value to a relationship, it can also remove an important source of value from people’s lives and so whether it makes sense to adopt a policy of SE will depend on the personalities, values, interests, and situations of the lovers.

**4) Problems with SE as a norm**

Up to this point I have been considering whether SE is an intelligible policy for a couple to adopt. As I have argued, a couple’s choice to be sexually exclusive can be justified if their SE will contribute to the value of their relationship. However, SE is not merely a practice that some people choose and others do not; it is a hegemonic cultural norm, which makes people take it for granted that they will be sexually exclusive, rather than seeing it as a choice. Indeed, few couples even talk about whether or not they will be sexually exclusive, and many people do not reflect on their own reasons for choosing SE, because they do not see it as a choice that needs justification. The excuse, ‘but I didn’t know we were meant to be exclusive’ is not generally held to reasonably excuse sexual infidelity, even if the couple have never discussed the matter. Furthermore, as I have already mentioned, those who value sexual freedom over having a sexually exclusive relationship run the risk of being looked down upon by society. Therefore, the dominance of the norm of SE means that many people are sexually exclusive without taking the time to consider why this is a sensible policy. In this section, I’ll discuss two problems with the hegemony of the norm of SE: (1) the dominance of the norm makes people less likely to consider their reasons for choosing it, thus diminishing the possible value it adds to their relationship. (2) It gives the idea of faithfulness the wrong focus.

**4.1) The dominance of the norm of SE diminishes its value**

Ideally, we don’t want our partners to really want to have sex with others but to not do so because they have made a promise to be sexually exclusive; we want them to not even desire to have sex with anyone else. If they do desire others though, we hope that this desire is overridden by their valuing the SE they share with us. However, if we do not really have the choice to *not* be sexually exclusive, then it will be harder for us to really appreciate the value of SE. Choosing X over Y makes the way we experience X different to if X had been the default, and, provided we feel that we have made the right decision, can make us value X more. Therefore, not having the option to choose SE can diminish its potential value and might make us less committed to it. Further, if your partner is sexually faithful to you only because of a promise they felt they could not choose *not* to make, their fidelity does not mean as much as if they had freely chosen to be only with you. Knowing this, we often fear that our partners will cheat on us, or that they do not really want to be sexually exclusive with us; these fears can contribute to a general sense of insecurity and anxiety which sometimes accompanies romantic love.

Although, as I have argued, there can be good reasons to be sexually exclusive, the hegemony of SE prevents people from considering these and from constructing and negotiating intimate relationships on their own terms. It also creates misunderstandings about the purpose and meaning of SE. What’s more, the paucity of realistic alternatives causes many people to feign SE whilst secretly practising non-exclusivity, as identifying as a sexually exclusive person can be more important than actually practising it. This can, of course, have devastating results for both the person cheated on and the cheater, such as the end of their relationship, as well as debilitating feelings of shame and guilt for the cheater and resentment and humiliation for the victim. Indeed, many people struggle to adhere to the norm. Figures vary massively between studies, but they tend to suggest that about 30%[[460]](#footnote-460) to 70%[[461]](#footnote-461) of married people have been sexually unfaithful. Furthermore, we should bear in mind that these figures only represent married people, and the number of people who *admit* to infidelity in studies. Therefore, the figures may be closer to the higher end of the scale if we also include non-married people who cheat on their partners and those who do not admit to infidelity. Although not adhering to a norm does not necessarily show that one is not committed to it, it is fair to assume that one might be less prone to breaking one’s commitment had one reflected on one’s reasons for deciding to follow it.

Therefore, the dominance of the norm of SE leaves people with few to zero options if they do not want to be sexually exclusive but still have a romantic relationship, which is, in our society, generally the most intimate relationship adults have. This lack of alternatives leads some people to enter sexually exclusive relationships without really considering what the commitment to SE means to them. Thus, they do not really believe in the value of it and so even for those who remain sexually exclusive, their faithfulness to their partner will be less meaningful as it is the result of adhering to a norm rather than caring about their relationship, and it may give way to feelings of resentment. They may also feel anxious and insecure about whether their partner feels the same. Furthermore, the pressure to be sexually exclusive is perhaps a contributing factor to the high rate of adultery: since people do not really have the choice to be openly non-sexually-exclusive, they might feign SE whilst in practice being non-sexually-exclusive. If SE was an option, then people could at least discuss it more openly and may have more authentic, fulfilling and less anxiety-ridden relationships whether or not they did decide to adopt SE as a policy.

**4.2) The norm of SE gives the notion of faithfulness the wrong focus**

Because SE is such a dominant social norm, we tend to see it as having absolute, rather than supportive value, and thus our concept of what it means to be a faithful romantic partner is skewed. We sometimes mistakenly equate SE with love and therefore, even a desire to have extra-relatal sex can be construed as an indication of a lack of love, as can, indeed, not being jealous of your partner having extra-relatal sex. This means that we might think we are being a good and faithful romantic partner if we are sexually exclusive, and we often assume that sexual infidelity makes someone a bad romantic partner, or that an adulterer, or a person who accepts their partner’s adultery, no longer loves their partner (in the right way). The consequences of these ways of thinking are that otherwise fulfilling and strong relationships might end due to sexual infidelity and that people might not recognise that they are being unfaithful to the relationship by non-sexual infidelity, such as being neglectful of one’s partner. There is an unwarranted shame in being cheated on. This adds to pressure on victims of cheating to end the relationship rather than forgive their partner, even if that’s what they really want to do.

This is not to say that there is nothing wrong with being sexually unfaithful. As Richard Wasserstrom observes, sexual infidelity is wrong because it is a violation of at least one of four moral rules: 1) do not break promises, 2) do not deceive, 3) do not be unfair and 4) do not cause unjustifiable harm.[[462]](#footnote-462) An instance of sexual infidelity might involve the breaking of a promise to be sexually faithful, deception (though this may not be explicit), unfairness if your partner is being sexually faithful on the understanding that you are too and it might hurt your partner when they find out. However, as Wasserstrom observes, if a couple have explicitly agreed not to be sexually exclusive and are both happy with this arrangement, then it is not wrong for either or both of them to have extra-relatal sex. This is because it does not violate any of the four moral codes listed above.[[463]](#footnote-463) Therefore, sexual infidelity’s wrongness is derivative of other moral wrongs, which means that it is not necessarily more wrong than other kinds of promise breaking, deception, unfairness and unjustifiable harm. It might be objected that this is not right, because the promise to be sexually exclusive is a very special promise and so what you have done wrong is not just broken *a* promise, but broken *that* promise. This is true: breaking a promise to be SE is not the same as breaking a promise to do the washing up. However, it *is* comparable to the promise to do other things which will support the relationship, such as spending quality time with your partner. Thus, although the promise to be sexually exclusive is important, if it is not a necessary or intrinsic feature of romantic love, but rather has a supportive role in the relationship, then it seems difficult to make a case for it being more immoral to have extra-relatal sex than to do other things which undermine the relationship, or indeed to not do things which would support the relationship. This is especially true if the couple have not openly discussed whether they would be sexually exclusive or reflected on their reasons for making the decision. Thus, you break a very special promise – indeed, the same promise you make when you agree to be sexually exclusive – when you, for example, do not include your partner in a key life decision or emotionally support them when they are having a tough time.

In Chapter Four, I argued that we love people because we value the relationship we share with them. Furthermore, in Chapter Five, I argued that romantic relationships are similar to friendships but with two important differences: 1) romantic relationships involve sharing your life and identity in a distinct and significant way, and 2) they are more exclusive. Therefore, being a good romantic partner usually means doing the same sorts of things that make a person a good friend, but also being willing and open to share a large part of your life and identity with your partner in a way that you don’t with anyone else. Being faithful to your partner ought to mean trying to uphold these values in order to preserve the relationship and care for your partner in the appropriate way. The commitment to SE can be a way of doing this, but it is a means to an end, not the end itself; SE is not the foundation stone of a romantic relationship. As Martin puts it, ‘the primary commitment is to love each other, while the commitment of sexual exclusivity is secondary and supportive.’[[464]](#footnote-464) Moreover, there are other important ways we can and should be faithful in our relationships. These are not set in stone and may vary somewhat depending on what particular couples find important. For example, one couple might find it very important that they are completely open with each other and commit to this being a way that they mark out their relationship as distinct and special. In this case, it would count as a kind of infidelity for one of them to keep a significant secret from the other, such as that they had lost their job. Similarly, if a couple agree to share a life together it might be a kind of infidelity for one of them to make a key life decision without consulting the other, such as taking on a new hobby which will require most of their leisure time. Indeed, insofar as it prevents you from sharing a life and identity together, simply not spending enough time with your partner or not being open emotionally with them might constitute a kind of unfaithfulness. Thus, not every inconsiderate act towards one’s partner counts as a kind of infidelity, but actions, or a lack of actions, which diminish the value of the relationship, break significant commitments and prevent the relationship being marked out as distinct and special, ought to be seen in the same light as sexual infidelity. If we want to maintain that sexual infidelity is wrong, we need to also accept that there are other ways of committing the same kind of wrong and that sexual infidelity is not necessarily worse than these.

This is an important conceptual point: we’ve simply got the meaning of the notion of faithfulness wrong. It is also a practical point: if we have the idea of faithfulness wrong then our romantic relationships may not be as fulfilling as we hope. However, it is also an ethical point, a matter of fairness. It is unfair for us to assume, as we often do, that it is always worse to be sexually unfaithful than to be a bad romantic partner in other ways, such as being neglectful. Suppose, for example, that Jason spends little time with Matilda, frequently forgets to return her calls and text messages, takes his holidays alone or with his friends rather than her, and doesn’t make any effort with her family, despite her asking him to. However, he is sexually faithful to her and never cruel to her, and thus considers himself to be a good romantic partner. One evening in a bar, a man shows Matilda a great deal of attention and she has sex with him. It is clear that Matilda has behaved wrongly here, violating her implicit promise to be sexually faithful. However, it seems that Jason has also broken an implicit promise to her to do what he can to support their relationship. It is simply easier to articulate the wrongness of Matilda’s action. Furthermore, under UK divorce law if they were married, Jason could petition for a divorce purely on the grounds of adultery. Matilda, on the other hand, would have to petition on the grounds of ‘unreasonable behaviour’ which would require her to convince a judge that Jason’s behaviour was insufferable (unless they had lived apart for two years and Jason consented to the divorce, or five years if he did not consent). However, both partners have violated commitments to each other and it is important to recognise this when we judge their actions.

Taking a broader view of faithfulness would thus make people feel more justified in complaining that their partner is not taking their obligations (aside from SE) to the relationship seriously; and it might also be more conducive to getting us what we actually want – fulfilling romantic relationships. In addition, although we should continue to see sexual infidelity as wrong, we should see it for what it is, rather than elevating its significance. As Emens notes: ‘cheating might be less painful for some if the world did not assume that the extramarital activity was the betrayal of a sacred promise, or if the parties did not establish sexual fidelity as the foundational promise of their relationship.’[[465]](#footnote-465) In short, the hegemony of SE can make us put the virtue of sexual fidelity on a pedestal, thus under-emphasising other kinds of fidelity and overlooking other ways in which we can be unfaithful to our romantic partners.

**5) Conclusion**

I began this chapter with the question of whether it makes sense to adopt a policy of SE, which entails a significant restriction of one’s freedom, in the name of romantic love. In response to this question, I first considered four ways in which this restriction might be justified: 1) romantic relationships are necessarily sexually exclusive; 2) SE protects the relationship; 3) jealousy gives us reason to be sexually exclusive; 4) extra-relatal sex denies the significance of the sex in the relationship. I argued that none of these justifications is successful, but that, nevertheless, these justifications did draw on important points about romantic love and its relationship with sex and SE. Furthermore, there is a case for SE if it contributes to the value of their relationship. SE gives the couple a private space in which to affirm and celebrate their unique shared identity and life. It helps them to mark out their relationship as distinct from other relationships and to care for each other effectively.

However, although SE can be justified, it is not morally superior to adopt a policy of SE than not to, nor is SE a necessary feature of romantic love. Therefore, SE ought not to be the hegemonic social norm that it is, and there should be greater toleration for non-sexually-exclusive relationship types. This would benefit not only those who do not want to be sexually exclusive, but also those who do. By being so dominant, the norm of SE robs people of the opportunity to choose the policy for the right reasons. Indeed, it stops some people from even considering the reasons and, therefore, they do not make a reflected choice to be sexually exclusive and so they do not fully understand or appreciate the value it has. This not only makes adultery more likely, but also diminishes the value that SE could bring to the relationship. In addition, the norm gives the idea of ‘faithfulness’ the wrong focus. We ought to primarily be faithful to our relationships, to do what is needed to preserve them. SE can be a part of this, but it ought not to be elevated above other kinds of fidelity and demonstrations of loving commitment, all of which are important.

**Concluding Remarks**

The main questions this thesis has sought to address are:

1. Can the requirement of monogamy be justified in the name of romantic love?
2. Is monogamous romantic love distinctly valuable?
3. Should monogamy be a hegemonic social norm?

I have argued that, although the answer to the first two questions is ‘yes’, the answer to the third is ‘no’. This is because the relationship between monogamy and romantic love is contingent on various factors, such as the values and interests of the lovers, and, moreover, monogamy is not *ceteris paribus* morally superior to non-monogamous forms of sexual and intimate relations. I began this thesis by arguing that moral arguments which prohibit all sex outside a monogamous relationship are unpersuasive. This is, in part, because they do not fully and accurately describe the value of romantic love or its relationship with sex. Therefore, I set out to provide a detailed description and analysis of romantic love and its connection with sex in order to see if doing so would provide us with moral reasons to be monogamous.

I argued, *contra* Frankfurt, that there are reasons for romantic love but that this does not make it any less valuable than other kinds of love. Like other kinds of love, it involves a caring attitude towards one’s beloved; the lover wants the beloved to fare well. However, this caring attitude is modified by certain desires, such as the desire to be intimate with one’s beloved and to have one’s love returned. Thus, the lover does not necessarily want what is best for her beloved if this conflicts with what is best for their relationship. Distinct from familial love, but similar to friendship, romantic love is selective and conditional: we choose our romantic beloveds, and our love for them will not persist in all circumstances. There are reasons for romantic love, and whom we love romantically depends, in part, on to whom we are attracted. We are attracted to people on the basis of their qualities, but their properties do not justify our love for them, as Keller and Delaney claim. Rather, what justifies our love is, as Kolodny argues, that we value the relationship we share with them.

To assess the value of monogamous romantic relationships, I first considered the ways in which romantic love differs from friendship, arguing that the main differences lie in the way that you share your life and identity with your beloved, and in the commitment that romantic relationships require as a result. By sharing your identity with your partner, you are not only well-located to care for, support and provide companionship for them, you also give them a particular kind of recognition, caring about the trivialities of their life and thereby infusing it with significance. These kinds of benefits could be attained in a relationship between more than two people, though our psychological limitations mean that we could not share our identities in the way required by romantic love with more than a very small number of people. However, there may also be advantages to a two-person relationship: it is generally easier to share your life and identity with one person only. Moreover, in a two-person romantic relationship each partner will feel that their unique importance has been affirmed because they have been chosen as *the* person with whom their partner wants to share their life. Nonetheless, a two-person relationship is not necessarily more fulfilling than a relationship between more than two.

I objected to the claim that sex is *the* distinguishing factor between romantic love and friendship, on the grounds that some friends have sex, and some romantic lovers do not. Nonetheless, it is clear that there is a relationship between sex and love, and I argued that it is crucial to get a handle on this if we are to justify the requirement of sexual exclusivity in romantic love. I observed that sex has various expressive and symbolic qualities that can make it an effective vehicle for love: building, expressing and constituting it. In particular, sex acts as a vehicle for four of the central goods of romantic love: 1) pleasure, (2) union/physical closeness, (3) intimacy and (4) vulnerability and care. Thus, it makes sense that, barring impediments, a romantic relationship will have a sexual element.

Because of these qualities of sex, combined with the distinct value of romantic love, sexual exclusivity can act as an affirmation of the value of the relationship. It can also have supportive value, helping the lovers to care for each other and distinguish their relationship from other relationships. However, the hegemonic social norm of sexual exclusivity diminishes this value by robbing people of the opportunity to choose it for the right reasons. Furthermore, the dominance of the norm can lead us to overlook the point of sexual fidelity, which is to support the relationship on which the love is based. Thus, we sometimes neglect other forms of faithfulness and mistakenly equate sexual exclusivity with love.

Therefore, once we fill in the details of what a romantic relationship is, and how sex and exclusivity fit into it, we can see that monogamy is an intelligible aspiration that can be justified in the name of romantic love, and so that there can be distinct value in monogamy. A two-person romantic relationship can be an important part of a well-rounded life and sexual exclusivity can contribute to this relationship. Nonetheless, the value of monogamy is contingent on various factors, including the personalities of the lovers and societal norms. Monogamy entails the loss of freedom to engage in sexually and emotionally intimate relationships with others and this will severely impinge on the flourishing and fulfilment of some people. If someone has made a pact to be monogamous then it is morally wrong to break that pact without the consent of one’s partner, but two people who make such a pact are not *ceteris paribus* morally superior to people who choose not to. Monogamy can support romantic love, but it is also possible to enjoy the advantages of a romantic relationship if such a relationship holds between more than two people and/or if it is not sexually exclusive. Thus, monogamy is not incompatible with romantic love, but neither is it essential for it.

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43. Scruton, 2001, p. 92 [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
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45. Scruton, 2001, pp. 90-93 [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Scruton, 2001, p. 339. One might argue, in opposition to Scruton, that absent any society that could serve as a comparison, we cannot know that love flourishes *better* in the societies Scruton has in mind. Therefore, even if his claim is correct, and I don’t think it is, what he takes as evidence for his view might not actually be very good evidence at all. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Scruton, 2001, p. 92 [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
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56. Marino, Patricia. ‘The Ethics of Sexual Objectification: Autonomy and Consent’ *Inquiry.* Vol. 51, No. 4 (2008) p. 354 [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Kant, 2009, p. 427 [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Korsgaard, 1999, p. 195 and footnote 15 [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Friedman, Marilyn. ‘Romantic Love and Personal Autonomy’, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy.* Vol. 22, No. 1 (Sept. 1998) p. 174 [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Kant, 2009, p. 428 [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Kant, 2001, p. 156 [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Of course, people often do mistreat each other sexually, even when not taking them solely as an object of pleasure. My point is just that you do not necessarily do so. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Marino, 2008, p. 350 [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Marino, 2008, p. 353. It might be argued that women tend to suffer in this way more than men. For example, Russell Vannoy claims that ‘millions of husbands practice only a crude form of the sex act that leaves their wives unfulfilled.’ in *Sex without Love.* New York: Prometheus Books (1980) p. 27 [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. I am focussing on the new natural law accounts, rather than religious accounts, because the latter have appeal only if one believes in a god. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Finnis, John. ‘Marriage: A Basic and Exigent Good’. *The Monist.* Vol. 91, No.3 (2008) p. 389 [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Finnis, 2008, p. 390 [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Finnis, 2008, p. 391 [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Finnis, 2008, p. 396 Incidentally, Kant does not think that sex must be open to procreation to be moral, arguing in *The Metaphysics of Morals:* ‘The end of begetting and bringing up children may be an end of nature, for which it implanted the inclinations of the sexes for each other; but it is not requisite for human beings who marry to make this their end in order for their union to be compatible with rights, for otherwise marriage would be dissolved when procreation ceases.’ Kant, 2009, p277 [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Finnis, 2008, p. 390, footnote 8. This is a somewhat worrying statement as without qualification of what counts as a ‘sufficient reason’ this claim could be seen to legitimise marital rape. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Finnis, 2008, p. 392. Incidentally, this is a strange definition of sex `for pleasure alone’ since it doesn’t actually reference pleasure. It seems to also apply to, for example, a woman who is having sex with her husband only because she desperately wants to get pregnant and is, in fact, indifferent to the identity of her husband. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Finnis, 2008, p. 393 [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Finnis, 2008, p. 393 [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Finnis, 2008, p. 393, footnote 16 [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Finnis, 2008, p. 396 [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Finnis, 2008, pp. 394-5 [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Finnis, 2008, p. 396 [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Geach, Mary Catherine. ‘Lying with the Body’, *The Monist.* Vol. 91, No.3 (2008), p. 526 [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Geach, 2008, p. 531 [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Geach, 2008, p. 525 [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Geach, 2008, pp. 546-548 [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Geach, 2008, p. 528 [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Geach, 2008, p. 525 [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Geach, 2008, p. 524 [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Geach, 2008, p. 544 [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Geach, 2008, p. 533 [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Geach, 2008, p. 535 [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Geach, 2008, pp. 526-7 [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. For example, both Finnis (p. 397) and Geach (p. 533) use metaphors of colonialisation and imperialism to describe the growing toleration of homosexuality in Western society. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Primoratz, 1999, p. 17 [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. West, Robin. ‘The Harms of Consensual Sex’ in Soble, Alan (Ed.) *The Philosophy of Sex* Maryland. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. (2002) [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. See, for example: Fitzgerald, Bridget. ‘Children of Lesbian and Gay Parents. A Review of the Literature’ *Marriage and Family Review.* Vol. 29, No. 1 (1999); Golombok, Susan and Badger, Shirlene, ‘Children Raised in Mother-headed Families from Infancy: a Follow-up of Children of Lesbian and Single Heterosexual Mothers, at Early Adulthood.’ *Human Reproduction.* Vol. 25, No. 1 (2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Amato Paul R. and Booth Alan, cited in Garrison, Marsha ‘Promoting Cooperative Parenting: Programs and Prospects,’ *Journal of Law and Family Studies* Vol. 9 (2007) p. 266 [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Brake, 2012, pp. 147-8 [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Frankfurt, Harry. ‘Duty and Love’, *Philosophical Explorations: An International Journal for the Philosophy of Mind and Action.* Vol. 1, No.1. (1998) p. 6 [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Frankfurt, Harry. ‘Taking Ourselves Seriously and Getting it Right‘ in Satz, Debra (ed.) *Taking Ourselves Seriously and Getting it Right.* Stanford: Stanford University Press (2006) p. 41 [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 41 [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Soble, Alan. ‘Review of “The Reasons of Love”’, *Essays in Philosophy.* Vol. 6, No. 1. (2005) p. 6 [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Frankfurt, 2004*,* p. 37 [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 43 and Frankfurt in Satz 2006, p. 40 [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. In this thesis I will use the term ‘lovers’ to refer to someone who loves romantically, rather than its perhaps more common use to refer to a sexual partner. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 79 [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 79 [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 80 [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 80 [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Levy, Donald. ‘The Definition of Love in Plato's Symposium’, *Journal of the History of Ideas.* Vol. 40, No. 2 (1979) p. 285 [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Levy, 1979, p. 286 [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Vlastos, Gregory. ‘The Individual as Object of Love in Plato’ in *Platonic Studies.* Princeton: Princeton University Press. (1981) p. 28 [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Keller, 2000, p. 166 [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. A study cited by Aaron Ben-Ze’ev in ‘Romantic Love and Sexual Desire’, *Philosophia.* Vol. 25, No. 1-3 (1997) p.6 found that 64% of the men and 24% of the women questioned in a survey would not marry someone who had all the characteristics they liked but whom they did not love. This suggests that people believe love to be something more than just the favouring of positive qualities of a person. (The large gender difference here is also interesting and may suggest that men and women experience their reasons for love differently. Unfortunately this issue is beyond the remit of this thesis so I cannot discuss it here.) [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Nozick, 1995, p. 235 [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 38 [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Frankfurt in Satz, 2006, p. 41 [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 38 [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Frankfurt, Harry. *Necessity, Volition and Love.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (1999) p. 129 [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 39 [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Soble, 2005, p. 5. (The original ‘Euthyphro problem’ can be found in Plato’s dialogue *Euthyphro,* in which Socrates asks Euthryphro whether things are good because the gods love them, or if the gods love them because they are good). [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Hammerstein, Oscar and Rodgers, Richard. *Do I Love You Because You’re Beautiful? Broadway Production of Cinderella* (1957)retrieved from: http://cinderellaonbroadway.com/lyrics (Accessed January 2011) [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Frankfurt in Satz, 2006, p. 42 [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Frankfurt in Satz, 2006, p. 26 [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Frankfurt in Satz, 2006, p. 26 [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Frankfurt, 2004, pp. 52-53 [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 17 [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 22 [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Frankfurt, 1999, p. 138 [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. See for example Soble, 2005, p9 and Wolf, Susan. ‘The True, the Good, and the Lovable: Frankfurt’s Avoidance of Objectivity’ in Buss, Sarah and Overton, Lee (eds.), *The Contours of Agency: Essays on Themes from Harry Frankfurt.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, (2002), p. 227 [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Frankfurt, 2002, p. 246 [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Frankfurt, 2002, pp. 246-247 [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 79 [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 79 Note that in this phrase, Frankfurt says that love is for persons, yet elsewhere he writes about love for objects, places, ideas etc. I raise the objection later about whether love, as Frankfurt construes it, can just be for people. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Foster, Gary. ‘Romantic Love and Knowledge: Refuting the Claim of Egoism.’ *Dialogue.* Vol. 47, No. 2 (2008) p. 239 [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 59 [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 61 [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 79 [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 80 [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 46 [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Frankfurt, 1999, p. 170 [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 80 [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 80 [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 80 [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Frankfurt, 1988, p. 88 [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Frankfurt, 1988, p. 86 [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 46 [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Frankfurt, 1999, p. 137 [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Frankfurt, 1971, pp. 6-7 [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. Frankfurt, 1971, p. 10 [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Frankfurt in Satz, 2006, p. 51 [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Frankfurt in Satz, 2006, p. 33 [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 20 [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Frankfurt in Satz, 2006, p. 41 [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. Frankfurt, 2002, p. 250 [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Nin, Anaïs. *Henry and June: the Unexpurgated Journal (1931-1932) of Anaï*s *Nin.* London: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1990, p. 90 [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Shand, John. ‘Love As If’. *Essays in Philosophy.* Vol.12, No. 1 (2011) p. 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. We might ask a similar question: ‘what do you love about her?’ but the response this seems to be anticipating is more along the line of ‘what qualities of hers do you appreciate?’ [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Solomon, 2002, p. 12 [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Shand, 2011, p. 6 [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. Shand, 2011, p. 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Soble, 2005, p. 6 [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Landrum, Ty. ‘Persons as Objects of Love’, *Journal of Moral Philosophy.* Vol. 6, No. 4 (2009) p. 420 [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. Solomon, 2002, p. 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Shand, 2011, pp. 6-7 [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Shand, 2011, p. 4 [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Shand, 2011, p. 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Delaney, 1996, p. 350 [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. To clarify: the relation between conditionality and reasons is that if love is justified by reasons then it is conditional on its reasons. If there are no reasons for it, there are no conditions. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Solomon, 2002, pp. 8-9 [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Solomon, 2002, pp. 2-3 [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 79 [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Of course, romantic love requires a degree of commitment as well though; being ready to leave at the first sign of problems might indicate that you are not really in love. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 43 [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 83 [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Frankfurt in Satz 2006, p. 41 [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Foster, Gary. ‘Bestowal Without Appraisal: Problems in Frankfurt’s Characterization of Love and Personal Identity’, *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice.* Vol. 12, No. 2 (2009) p. 162 [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. Foster, 2009, p. 163 [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Foster, 2009, p. 163 [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 43: ‘Among relationships between humans, the love of parents for their infants or small children is the species of caring that comes closest to offering recognizably pure instances of love.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 79 [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Frankfurt in Satz, 2006, p. 40 [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Frankfurt in Satz, 2006, p. 41 [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. Frankfurt, Harry. *The Importance of What We Care About.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1988) p. 94 [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. Kolodny, 2003, p. 138 [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. Wolf, 1993, p. 236 [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. Baier Annette. ‘Caring About Caring: A Reply to Frankfurt’, *Synthese.* Vol. 53, No. 2 (1982) p. 274 [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. Frankfurt, 1988, p. 92. ‘The question of what to care about…is one which must necessarily be important to him’. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. Frankfurt, 2002, pp. 246-8 [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. Soble, 2005, p. 8 [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. Solomon, 2002, p. 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. Keller, 2000, p. 167 [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. Edyvane, Derek. ‘Against Unconditional Love’, *Journal of Applied Philosophy.* Vol. 20, No. 1 (2003) p. 72 [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. Baier makes a similar point: ‘it is a fairly good criterion for genuine love in Frankfurt’s sense, namely, a genuine instance of love – typically the lover *does* want others to find the loved one lovable’. 1982, p. 281 [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. Foster, 2008, p. 243 [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. Dixon, Nicholas. ‘Romantic Love, Appraisal, and Commitment’. *Philosophical Forum.* Vol. 38, No. 4 (2007) p. 383 [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. Jollimore, Troy. *Love’s Vison.* Oxford: Princeton University Press (2011) p. 142 [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. Delaney, 1996, pp. 350-1 [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 80 [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. Frankfurt, 1998, p. 6 [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. Frankfurt, 2006, p. 41 [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. Helm, Bennett W. ‘Love, Identification, and the Emotions’, *American Philosophical Quarterly.* Vol. 46, No. 1. (Jan. 2009) p. 41 [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. Helm, 2009, p. 46 [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. Helm, 2009, p. 49 [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. Foster, 2008, p. 246 [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. Baier, 1982, p. 274 [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 80 [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. A person might be able to choose whether or not to procreate, but they cannot choose what their children will be like so they do not choose to be in a relationship with that particular child. [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. Keller, 2000, p. 165 [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. Foster, 2008, p. 159 [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. Bratman, Michael. ‘A Thoughtful and Reasonable Stability’ in Satz, Debra (ed.) *Taking Ourselves Seriously and Getting it Right.* Stanford: Stanford University Press (2006) p. 85 [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. Wolf, 1993, p. 239 [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. Foster, 2008, p. 162 [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. I will use the words ‘qualities’ and ‘properties’ interchangeably. [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. Frankfurt, 1988, p. 94 ‘it seems that it must be the fact that it is possible for him to care about the one and not the other, or to care about the one in a way which is more important to him than the way in which it is possible for him to care about the other. The person does not care about the object because its worthiness commands that he do so. On the other hand, the worthiness of the activity of caring commands that he choose an object which he will be able to care about.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. Frankfurt, 2004, p. 38 [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. Frankfurt, 1999, p. 129 [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. It does not seem necessary to like your family members in order to love them though, so Frankfurt might be right that liking is not a necessary condition of love as a whole. [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. Plato, *The Symposium*. Howatson, M. C. and Sheffield, Frisbee C. C. (eds.), translated by Howatson, M.C. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2008) p. 52 [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. Levy, 1979, p. 286 [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. Vlastos, 1981, p. 28 [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. Vlastos, 1973, p. 32 [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. W.B. Yeat’s poem, ‘For Anne Gregory’ is often cited in the philosophical literature on the reasons for love. In this poem, Anne wants to be loved ‘for herself alone and not for her yellow hair.’ The poet tells her that only God could love her in this way. One interpretation of this poem is that it brings out nicely the distinction between the Frankfurtian school of thought and the quality view. For Frankfurt, only if Anne is loved ‘for herself alone’ is she loved authentically. The quality theorist, on the other hand, claims that she *is* loved ‘for her yellow hair’ but that there is nothing problematic in this. Another way of looking at the poem might be that Anne feels that in being loved for her yellow hair she is being loved for the wrong sorts of qualities. [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. Nozick, 1995, p. 235 [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. Dixon, 2007, p. 377 [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. Jollimore, 2011, p. 43 [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. Jollimore, 2011, p. 75 [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. Kolodny, 2003, p. 139 [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. Keller, 2000, p. 163 [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. This is in line with O.H. Green: ‘Is Love an Emotion?’ in Lamb, Robert (Ed.) *Love Analyzed.* Oxford: Westview Press (1997). Green also argues that love is not an emotion, although ‘love disposes one to feel a range of love-related emotions’. (p. 221) [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. Keller, 2000, p. 164 [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. Keller, 2000, p. 165 [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. Keller, 2000, pp. 165-166 [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. Keller, 2000, p. 166 [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. Keller, 2000, p. 170 [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. Keller, 2000, p. 171 [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. Keller, 2000, p. 166 [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. Keller, 2000, pp. 164-5 [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. Delaney, 1996, p. 339 [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. He borrows this idea from Nozick, who argues that romantic love just is, ‘wanting to form a *we* with a particular person’ which involves forming an additional joint identity wherein the lovers pool their autonomy and well-being. Nozick, 1995, p. 232 [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. Delaney, 1996, p. 340 [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. Delaney, 1996, p. 343 [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. Delaney, 1996, p. 344 [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. Delaney, 1996, p. 343 [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. Delaney, 1996, p. 343 [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. Delaney, 1996, p. 346 [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. Delaney, 1996, p. 347 [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. Delaney, 1996, p. 349 [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. Delaney, 1996, pp. 349-50 [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. Delaney, 1996, p. 347 [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. Delaney, 1996, p. 350-1 [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. Delaney, 1996, p. 51 [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. Delaney, 1996, p. 341 [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. I will say more on the relationship between the ‘we’ and the individual in Chapter Five. [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. Delaney, 1996, p. 341 [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. Delaney, 1996, pp. 342-3 [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. Delaney, 1996, p. 344. He considers the following example: ‘A is a good-hearted teenage rebel, who takes himself to be a nihilistic desperado when underneath it all he is a decent, gentle soul’ and suggests that ‘if the youthful desperado is as self-deceived as I take him to be, then what he wants is for the girl to love him for his apparent rebelliousness’. [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
254. Delaney, 1996, p. 344 [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
255. Keller, 2000, p. 170 [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
256. Delaney, 1996, p. 347 [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
257. Nozick, 1995, p. 234 [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
258. Nozick, 1995, p. 234 [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
259. Delaney, 1996, p. 348 [↑](#footnote-ref-259)
260. Delaney, 1996, p. 349 [↑](#footnote-ref-260)
261. Keller, 2000, p. 170 [↑](#footnote-ref-261)
262. Keller, 2000, p. 170 [↑](#footnote-ref-262)
263. Kolodny, 2003, p. 151 [↑](#footnote-ref-263)
264. We could instead, for example, not have a conception of romantic relationships but just have sexual relationships with some of our friends. [↑](#footnote-ref-264)
265. Kolodny, 2003, p. 136 [↑](#footnote-ref-265)
266. Kolodny, 2003, p. 140 [↑](#footnote-ref-266)
267. Kolodny, 2003, p. 146 Initially this might sound like it is intellectualising love too much; we do not tend to question whether we are in a relationship in which love is appropriate before loving someone. However, although love partly requires believing the relationship makes love appropriate, this belief can be semi-conscious, just as the belief that wrongdoing makes anger a fitting response need not be held fully consciously. In addition, sometimes when we are questioning whether we are ‘really in love’ with a person we might deliberate over whether our relationship is of the right sort to generate love. [↑](#footnote-ref-267)
268. Scheffler, Samuel. ’Relationships and Responsibilities’ *Philosophy and Public Affairs.* Volume 26, Issue 3. 1997. [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
269. Scheffler, 1997, pp. 196-197. [↑](#footnote-ref-269)
270. Scheffler, 1997, p. 205 [↑](#footnote-ref-270)
271. Frankfurt, 1998, p. 6 [↑](#footnote-ref-271)
272. Kolodny, 2003, pp. 142-146 [↑](#footnote-ref-272)
273. Kolodny, 2003, pp. 145-146 [↑](#footnote-ref-273)
274. Kolodny, 2003, p. 139 [↑](#footnote-ref-274)
275. Kolodny, 2003, p. 140 [↑](#footnote-ref-275)
276. Kolodny, 2003, p. 147 [↑](#footnote-ref-276)
277. Kolodny, 2003, p. 141 [↑](#footnote-ref-277)
278. Kolodny, 2003, p. 147 [↑](#footnote-ref-278)
279. Kolodny, 2003, p. 141 [↑](#footnote-ref-279)
280. Kolodny, 2003, p. 148 [↑](#footnote-ref-280)
281. Kolodny, 2003, p. 150 [↑](#footnote-ref-281)
282. Kolodny, 2003, p. 151 [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
283. Kolodny, 2003, pp. 151-153 [↑](#footnote-ref-283)
284. Kolodny, 2003, p. 154 [↑](#footnote-ref-284)
285. It should be noted that they do not just miss being in *a* romantic relationship: they might start a new romantic relationship with someone else, yet still miss the particular relationship they had with their previous partner. [↑](#footnote-ref-285)
286. Kolodny, 2003, p. 163 [↑](#footnote-ref-286)
287. Kolodny, 2003, p. 168 [↑](#footnote-ref-287)
288. A reason that he doesn’t discuss though, is that a person might simply not want to be in *any* (romantic) relationship anymore. I discuss this omission later on. [↑](#footnote-ref-288)
289. Kolodny, 2003, p166-7 [↑](#footnote-ref-289)
290. I think this is certainly true in some cases. We might not be initially attracted to someone but develop attraction for them through being in a relationship with them. Further, although we are not fully in control of to whom we are attracted, we can, for example, choose to focus on the qualities of our partner most likely to attract us to them. [↑](#footnote-ref-290)
291. Kolodny, 2003, p172 [↑](#footnote-ref-291)
292. Kolodny, 2003, p173 [↑](#footnote-ref-292)
293. Kolodny, 2003, p. 162 [↑](#footnote-ref-293)
294. This may not be true for familial love. It is comprehensible that a mother loves her unborn child or a person loves their sibling who was adopted at birth. Though there are relationships of a kind involved here, they do not fit Kolodny’s model. Nonetheless, we might suspect that this type of love would be different from love for people with whom we do share a relationship. [↑](#footnote-ref-294)
295. Kolodny, 2003, p. 171 [↑](#footnote-ref-295)
296. Smith, 2011, p. 79 [↑](#footnote-ref-296)
297. Smith, 2011, p. 77 [↑](#footnote-ref-297)
298. Smith, 2011, p. 79 [↑](#footnote-ref-298)
299. Smith, 2011, p. 80 [↑](#footnote-ref-299)
300. Kolodny, 2003, p. 147 [↑](#footnote-ref-300)
301. Dixon, 2007, p. 379 [↑](#footnote-ref-301)
302. Shand, 2011, p. 8 [↑](#footnote-ref-302)
303. Delaney, 1996, pp. 350-1 [↑](#footnote-ref-303)
304. Frankfurt distinguishes between acts done out of duty and acts done out of love. He points out that two people might perform the same action, say giving money to a needy person, with the same intention – to help him. However, the person doing it out of duty will do it because of a felt moral obligation whereas the person doing it out of love will do it simply because he loves the needy person; he does not need to deliberate over whether he is morally obliged to help them. Love, Frankfurt argues, is ‘*essentially constituted’* by this: ‘a lover takes the fact that an action would be helpful to his beloved as being *ipso facto* a reason for performing the action’. Frankfurt, 1998, p. 9 [↑](#footnote-ref-304)
305. Jollimore, 2011, p. 68 [↑](#footnote-ref-305)
306. Jollimore, 2011, p. 123 [↑](#footnote-ref-306)
307. Jollimore, 2011, p. 25 [↑](#footnote-ref-307)
308. Jollimore, 2011, p. 72 [↑](#footnote-ref-308)
309. Jollimore, 2011, p. 25 [↑](#footnote-ref-309)
310. Jollimore, 2011, p. 138. J. David Velleman (‘Love as a Moral Emotion’, *Ethics.* Vol. 109, No. 2 (Jan., 1999)) also suggests that love involves a way of seeing a person. He argues that love is a response to ‘seeing’ someone’s rational human nature; it ‘is the heart’s response to the realisation that it is not alone’ (p. 366). This makes love a moral emotion because it is impartial, a response to someone being a rational being. The reason we love some people and not others is that only some people’s personas ‘speak to us’ in ways that allow us to see their rational natures and thus their inherent value as a person (p. 373). We might think that we love someone for their gait, but really our love ‘is a response to his gait as an expression or symbol or reminder of his value as a person’ (p. 371). Kolodny objects to this point, pointing out that the qualities that usually attract us to people romantically or as friends, such as their gait or good-looks, are often not particularly good reminders or their rational nature (Kolodny, p. 174). In addition, Jollimore argues, rightly I think, that it is a false dilemma that we can be loved either for what is universal about us or what is distinctive about us. Instead, we want to be loved *both* as a person *and* as the particular person we are (Jollimore, pp. 134-5). This is particularly true with romantic love – Jason would probably not be satisfied if Matilda told him she loved him because she could see particularly well that he was a rational being and hence had intrinsic value. [↑](#footnote-ref-310)
311. Kolodny, 2003, pp. 170-171. [↑](#footnote-ref-311)
312. This is not always true with family relationships. A father is still, in some sense at least, a father, if he does not love his child. [↑](#footnote-ref-312)
313. Kolodny, 2003, p. 162 [↑](#footnote-ref-313)
314. Kolodny, 2003, p. 153 [↑](#footnote-ref-314)
315. Kolodny, 2003, p. 164 [↑](#footnote-ref-315)
316. Kolodny, 2003, pp. 149-150 [↑](#footnote-ref-316)
317. Kolodny, 2003, p. 172 [↑](#footnote-ref-317)
318. Kolodny, 2003, p. 149 [↑](#footnote-ref-318)
319. Kolodny, 2003, p. 165 [↑](#footnote-ref-319)
320. See, for example: Jollimore, 2011 and Helm, 2010 [↑](#footnote-ref-320)
321. Kolodny, 2003, p. 149 [↑](#footnote-ref-321)
322. Frankfurt’s explanation of why love is important to us – that it provides us with final ends – does not explain why romantic love is particularly important to us. [↑](#footnote-ref-322)
323. Jollimore, 2011, pp. xv-xvi [↑](#footnote-ref-323)
324. Helm, 2010 p. 4. Helm later describes romantic love as ‘a form of friendship in which the friends form a plural person in which the joint conception of their relationship more or less centrally involves romance’ (p288). However, he does not go into detail about what he means by ‘romance’, other than listing certain activities that might be considered romantic around which the romantic friends will centre their relationship. [↑](#footnote-ref-324)
325. This is not to say that one ought to always be loyal to one’s friend or partner. For example, if you know that your friend or lover is a serial killer, the right thing to do would probably be to turn them in to the police rather than protect them. [↑](#footnote-ref-325)
326. Indeed, we might note that family members often describe themselves as friends as well as sharing familial relationships. Thus, a friendship relation seems to be one that can exist within other relationship categories. [↑](#footnote-ref-326)
327. Some people have argued that we *should* be able to formalise friendship in a marriage contract. See, for example, Rosenbury, 2007, and Brake, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-327)
328. Kolodny, 2003, pp. 149-150 [↑](#footnote-ref-328)
329. For example if one or both or the partners are asexual or physically unable to have sex. [↑](#footnote-ref-329)
330. Plato, 2008, pp. 22-23 [↑](#footnote-ref-330)
331. Williams, 1997, p. 214 [↑](#footnote-ref-331)
332. Hegel in Williams, 1997, p. 212 [↑](#footnote-ref-332)
333. Solomon, Robert. ‘The Virtue of (Erotic) Love’ in Stewart, Robert M. (Ed.) *Philosophical Perspectives on Sex & Love.* Oxford: Oxford University Press (1995), p. 251 [↑](#footnote-ref-333)
334. Solomon, 1995, p. 252 [↑](#footnote-ref-334)
335. Solomon, 2002, p. 22 [↑](#footnote-ref-335)
336. Solomon, 2002, p. 24 [↑](#footnote-ref-336)
337. Nozick, 1995, p. 232 [↑](#footnote-ref-337)
338. Nozick, 1995, p. 232 [↑](#footnote-ref-338)
339. Nozick, 1995, p. 233 [↑](#footnote-ref-339)
340. Nozick, 1995, p. 238 [↑](#footnote-ref-340)
341. Nozick, 1995, p. 232 [↑](#footnote-ref-341)
342. Nozick, 1995, p. 235 [↑](#footnote-ref-342)
343. Nozick, 1995, p. 236 [↑](#footnote-ref-343)
344. Nonetheless, this will not apply to everyone. There are many special cases, for example, someone who disowns their family later on in life. [↑](#footnote-ref-344)
345. There are some groups that are more exclusive, to which you have to be invited. However, your invitation may still be due to features of you other than your character, such as your profession or social standing. [↑](#footnote-ref-345)
346. Gilbert, Margaret, ‘Walking Together: A Paradigmatic Social Phenomenon’, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy.* Vol. 15, No. 1 (1990) p. 7. I am not trying to give a definitive account of Gilbert’s view, which she develops in other papers and books. The crucial thing I want to take from Gilbert is the way in which a group is formed that involves duties and rights. [↑](#footnote-ref-346)
347. Gilbert, 1990, p. 6 [↑](#footnote-ref-347)
348. Gilbert, 1990, p. 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-348)
349. van Hooft, Stan. ‘Commitment and the Bond of Love’, *Australiasian Journal of Philosophy.* Vol. 73, No. 3 (June 2006) p. 459 [↑](#footnote-ref-349)
350. This does not mean, however, that the desire to share a life with someone entails that you love them. Countless tales of those who marry for wealth and convenience show that this is not the case. Arranged marriages are also an example of people who want to share a life but not necessarily because of love. [↑](#footnote-ref-350)
351. Roberts, Yvonne ‘A Painful Death Reveals that We Have Truly Lived and Loved’ in *The Guardian* Sunday 24 March 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-351)
352. Westlund Andrea, ‘The Reunion of Marriage’, *The Monist.* Vol. 91 No. 3 and 4 (2008) p. 569 [↑](#footnote-ref-352)
353. Westlund, Andrea, ‘Deciding Together’ *Philosophers’ Imprint.* Vol. 9, No. 10 (2009), pp. 4-5 [↑](#footnote-ref-353)
354. Westlund, 2009, p. 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-354)
355. Hegel in Williams, 1997, p. 212 [↑](#footnote-ref-355)
356. Bennett, Christopher. ‘Liberalism, Autonomy and Conjugal Love’, *Res Publica* Vol. 9, No. 3 (2003) p. 289 [↑](#footnote-ref-356)
357. We might be reminded here of expressions lovers use such as, ‘I love myself when I’m around you’ or ‘you bring out a different side to me.’ This is in contrast to Delaney’s claim, discussed in Chapter Three, that we want to be loved for whom we take ourselves to be. [↑](#footnote-ref-357)
358. Solomon, 1995, p. 252 [↑](#footnote-ref-358)
359. Soble, Alan. ‘Union, Autonomy and Concern’, in Lamb, Robert (ed.) *Love Analyzed.* Oxford: Westview Press. 1997, p. 77 [↑](#footnote-ref-359)
360. Soble, 1997, p. 83 [↑](#footnote-ref-360)
361. Soble, 1997, p. 83 [↑](#footnote-ref-361)
362. Friedman, 1998, p. 166 [↑](#footnote-ref-362)
363. Merino, Noël. ‘The Problem with “We”: Rethinking Joint Identity in Romantic Love’. *Journal of Social Philosophy,* Vol. 35 No.1 (2004) p. 129 [↑](#footnote-ref-363)
364. Friedman, 1998, p. 176 [↑](#footnote-ref-364)
365. Friedman, 1998, pp. 169-170 [↑](#footnote-ref-365)
366. Friedman, 1998, p. 174 [↑](#footnote-ref-366)
367. Just to reiterate, as this thesis is focussed on monogamy, I’ll be discussing two-person romantic love, though what I’m saying probably applies to romantic love between a small number of people as well. [↑](#footnote-ref-367)
368. There are limits to this – it is not justifiable for me to expect my lover to care deeply about very trivial matters, such as that my nail varnish chipped this morning. However, in an ideal romantic relationship the lovers will usually care about events that they each deem significant. Not doing so is a sign that they do not really care about each other. [↑](#footnote-ref-368)
369. Neu, Jerome. ‘Jealous Thoughts’ in Rorty, Amelie Oksenberg (Ed.) *Explaining Emotions,* London: University of California Press (1980) p. 451 [↑](#footnote-ref-369)
370. Jollimore, 2011, p. 89 [↑](#footnote-ref-370)
371. Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights.* London: Smith Elder Co. (1870) p67 [↑](#footnote-ref-371)
372. Jollimore, 2011, p. 72 [↑](#footnote-ref-372)
373. We might be reminded here of the George Bernard Shaw quote: ‘love is a gross exaggeration of the difference between one person and everybody else’ cited in Jollimore, 2011, p. 48 [↑](#footnote-ref-373)
374. Solomon, 1995, p. 254 [↑](#footnote-ref-374)
375. Bennett, 2003, p. 290 [↑](#footnote-ref-375)
376. Nozick, 1995, p. 232 [↑](#footnote-ref-376)
377. Bennett, 2003, pp. 295-6 [↑](#footnote-ref-377)
378. Bennett, 2003, p. 296 [↑](#footnote-ref-378)
379. Lewis, C.S. *The Four Loves.* London: Geoffrey Bles Ltd. (1960) p. 73 [↑](#footnote-ref-379)
380. It is currently common for there to be four people’s interests and plans to balance in the case of divorced and repartnered parents and often this works fine. However, they are not usually trying to all share a life together, but rather to spend time with the children. [↑](#footnote-ref-380)
381. Gerstein, Robert S. ‘Intimacy and Privacy’, *Ethics.* Vol. 89, No. 1 (Oct., 1978) p. 76 [↑](#footnote-ref-381)
382. Gerstein, 1978, pp. 77-79 [↑](#footnote-ref-382)
383. Golash, Deirdre. ‘Marriage, Autonomy, and the State: Reply to Christopher Bennett’, *Res Publica.* Vol. 12 (2006) p. 189 [↑](#footnote-ref-383)
384. Emens, Elizabeth. ‘Monogamy’s Law: Compulsory Monogamy and Polyamorous Existence’, *N.Y.U Review of Law and Social Change.* Vol. 29, No. 277 (2004) p. 322 [↑](#footnote-ref-384)
385. I borrow this term from Bennett, 2003 [↑](#footnote-ref-385)
386. This is perhaps one of the reasons why people feel that their relationship cannot continue as it was after adultery, even if both lovers care for one another just as much as before. [↑](#footnote-ref-386)
387. Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness.* Translated by Hazel Barnes. New York: Washington Square Press. (1992) p. 484 [↑](#footnote-ref-387)
388. Bennett, Christopher. ‘Autonomy and Conjugal Love: A Reply to Golash’, *Res Publica.* Vol. 12 (2006) p192 [↑](#footnote-ref-388)
389. Bennett, 2003, pp. 288-289 [↑](#footnote-ref-389)
390. Bennett, 2006, p. 192 [↑](#footnote-ref-390)
391. Bennett, 2003, p. 293 [↑](#footnote-ref-391)
392. Bennett, 2003, p. 294 [↑](#footnote-ref-392)
393. Keller, 2000, p. 167 [↑](#footnote-ref-393)
394. Bennett, 2003, pp. 297-8 [↑](#footnote-ref-394)
395. Bennett, 2003, p. 298 [↑](#footnote-ref-395)
396. This would be particularly the case if you told your partner that you would break up with them if they played chess with anyone other than you. [↑](#footnote-ref-396)
397. Research carried out by Susan Sprecher found a significant correlation between participants’ sexual satisfaction in their relationship and their overall relationship satisfaction, love for and commitment to their partner. ‘Sexual Satisfaction in Premarital Relationships: Associations with Satisfaction, Love, Commitment , and Stability.’ *The Journal of Sex Research.* Vol. 39, No. 3 (2002) p. 193 [↑](#footnote-ref-397)
398. Bisson, Melissa and Levine, Timothy. ‘Negotiating a Friends with Benefits Relationship’. *Archives of Sexual Behaviour.*  Vol. 38. (2009) p. 69 [↑](#footnote-ref-398)
399. To clarify: it is not reasonable to end a relationship because your partner will not have sex with you on one particular occasion. [↑](#footnote-ref-399)
400. Reik, Theodor. *Of Love and Lust: On the Psychoanalysis of Romantic and Sexual Emotions* New York: Grove Press, inc. (1959) p. 19 [↑](#footnote-ref-400)
401. Goldman, Alan. ‘Plain Sex’. *Philosophy and Public Affairs,* Vol. 6, No. 3 (Spring, 1977) p. 273 [↑](#footnote-ref-401)
402. Goldman, 1977, p. 273 [↑](#footnote-ref-402)
403. Goldman, 1977, p. 275 [↑](#footnote-ref-403)
404. Vannoy, 1980, p. 28 [↑](#footnote-ref-404)
405. Elliston, Frederick A. ‘In Defence of Promiscuity’, in Baker, Robert B.; Elliston, Frederick A. and Winninger, Kathleen J. (Eds.) *Philosophy and Sex*. New York: Prometheus Books (1998) p. 83 [↑](#footnote-ref-405)
406. Bayles, Michael D. ‘Marriage, Love and Procreation’ in Baker, Robert B.; Elliston, Frederick A. and Winninger, Kathleen J. (eds.) *Philosophy and Sex*. New York: Prometheus Books (1998) p. 121 [↑](#footnote-ref-406)
407. Goldman, for example, argues that ‘sexual desire is desire for contact with another person’s body and for the pleasure which such contact produces,’ 1977, p268. Primoratz, going further still, proposes that sexual desire is ‘sufficiently defined as the desire for certain bodily pleasures, period.’ 1999, p. 46 [↑](#footnote-ref-407)
408. Gregory, Paul. ‘Eroticism and Love’, *American Philosophical Quarterly.* Vol. 25, No. 4 (1988) p. 344 [↑](#footnote-ref-408)
409. Scruton, 2001, p. 17. Indeed, it is interesting to note that masturbation does not have anything like the symbolism attached to it that interpersonal sex has. This may be partly because masturbation is generally taboo, but it might also have something to do with the significance we give to the interpersonal aspects of sex, which will be discussed below. [↑](#footnote-ref-409)
410. Morgan, 2003, p. 380 [↑](#footnote-ref-410)
411. Nozick, 1995, p. 233 [↑](#footnote-ref-411)
412. Gregory, 1988, p. 339 [↑](#footnote-ref-412)
413. Nozick, 1995, p. 233 [↑](#footnote-ref-413)
414. Of course, one reason why we don’t talk about sex is because it is taboo. However, this does not seem to be all there is to it; excrement is taboo but not usually intimate, and we would react differently to someone who discussed their excrement in great detail compared with someone who discussed the sexual activity of them and their partner in great detail. Both disclosures would seem vulgar, but the latter would have the added element of disclosing intimate information about someone else which we tend to think they should keep private. [↑](#footnote-ref-414)
415. Giles, 1995, p. 349 [↑](#footnote-ref-415)
416. Bayles, 1998,p. 121 [↑](#footnote-ref-416)
417. Kaestle, Christine Elizabeth and Halpem, Carolyn Tucker. ‘What’s Love Got to Do with It? Sexual Behaviours of Opposite-Sex Couples’ *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health.* Vol. 39, No. 3 (2007) p. 137 [↑](#footnote-ref-417)
418. Giles, 1995, p. 344 [↑](#footnote-ref-418)
419. Giles, 1995, p. 344 [↑](#footnote-ref-419)
420. Giles, 1995, p. 348 [↑](#footnote-ref-420)
421. Giles, 1995, p. 352 [↑](#footnote-ref-421)
422. Giles, 1995, p. 345 [↑](#footnote-ref-422)
423. Giles, 1995, pp. 350-351 [↑](#footnote-ref-423)
424. I use the term ‘sexual exclusivity’ rather than ‘monogamy’ because I have defined ‘monogamy’ as ‘sexual and emotional exclusivity’ and in this chapter I want to focus primarily on the *sexual* exclusivity. [↑](#footnote-ref-424)
425. Betzig, Laura, ‘Causes of Conjugal Dissolution: A Cross-cultural Study’, *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 30, No. 5 (1989) [↑](#footnote-ref-425)
426. <http://thinking.grant-thornton.co.uk/bespoke/index.php/bespoke_templates/article/uk_statistics_of_divorce_2011_survey_graphic/> [↑](#footnote-ref-426)
427. Wreen, Michael J. ‘What’s Really Wrong with Adultery,’ *International Journal of Applied Philosophy* Vol. 3, No. 2 (1986) p. 45 [↑](#footnote-ref-427)
428. Wreen, 1986, p. 46 [↑](#footnote-ref-428)
429. Wreen, 1986, p. 46 [↑](#footnote-ref-429)
430. Wreen, 1986, p. 48 [↑](#footnote-ref-430)
431. Wreen, 1986, p. 45 [↑](#footnote-ref-431)
432. Wreen, 1986, p. 46 [↑](#footnote-ref-432)
433. Wreen, 1986, p. 46 [↑](#footnote-ref-433)
434. As I wrote in the introduction, polyamory takes many forms, including ‘open marriages’, where two people have a committed romantic relationship but have sexual relationships with those outside the relationship, as well as romantic relationships between small groups of people where everyone is intimate with everyone else. [↑](#footnote-ref-434)
435. Martin, Mike W. ‘Adultery and Fidelity’ in Baker, Robert B.; Elliston, Frederick A. And Winninger, Kathleen J. (eds.) *Philosophy and Sex*. New York: Prometheus Books (1998) p. 161 [↑](#footnote-ref-435)
436. Scruton, 2001, p. 339 [↑](#footnote-ref-436)
437. Shakespeare, William. *Othello* London: Penguin Books (2005), Act 3, scene 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-437)
438. Goldie, Peter. *The Emotions – A Philosophical Exploration.* Oxford: Oxford University Press (2002)p240 [↑](#footnote-ref-438)
439. Neu, 1980, p. 452 [↑](#footnote-ref-439)
440. Primoratz claims that ‘jealousy presupposes a view of interpersonal relations in terms of possession and rights.’ 1999, p. 86 [↑](#footnote-ref-440)
441. Neu, 1980, p. 433 [↑](#footnote-ref-441)
442. Murphy, Jeffrie. ‘Jealousy, Shame and the Rival’. *Philosophical Studies.* Vol. 108, No. 1-2 (2002) pp. 147-9 [↑](#footnote-ref-442)
443. Anderson, Eric. ‘“At Least with Cheating there is an Attempt at Monogamy”: Cheating and Monogamism among Undergraduate Heterosexual Men’, *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships.* Vol. 27, No. 7 (2010) p. 862 [↑](#footnote-ref-443)
444. Anderson, 2010, p. 863 [↑](#footnote-ref-444)
445. Buss, David. *The Dangerous Passion: Why Jealousy is as Necessary as Love and Sex.* London: Simon and Schuster (2000) p. 32 [↑](#footnote-ref-445)
446. Buss, David. ‘Strategies of Human Mating’ in *Psychological Topics.* Vol. 15, No. 2, (2006) p. 254 [↑](#footnote-ref-446)
447. See, for example: Buunk, Bram and Hupka, Ralph. ‘Cross-Cultural Differences in the Elicitation of Sexual Jealousy’ *The Journal of Sex Research*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Feb., 1987) [↑](#footnote-ref-447)
448. http://www.polyamory.org.uk/polyamory\_intro.html [↑](#footnote-ref-448)
449. Emens, 2004, p. 289 [↑](#footnote-ref-449)
450. Woollard, Fiona and Weaver, Bryan. ‘Marriage and the Norm of Monogamy’. *The Monist* Vol. 91, No.3 (July 2008) p. 508 [↑](#footnote-ref-450)
451. Woollard and Weaver, 2008, p. 516 [↑](#footnote-ref-451)
452. Woollard and Weaver, 2008, pp. 517-519 [↑](#footnote-ref-452)
453. Woollard and Weaver, 2008, p. 516 [↑](#footnote-ref-453)
454. Woollard and Weaver, 2008, p. 516 [↑](#footnote-ref-454)
455. Woollard and Weaver, 2008, pp. 515-516 [↑](#footnote-ref-455)
456. Note that many of the activities which have this function are culturally contingent. [↑](#footnote-ref-456)
457. This idea is in some way reminiscent of the way that children distinguish their ‘best friend’ from their other friends by, for example, only allowing that particular friend to play with their special doll. [↑](#footnote-ref-457)
458. Elliston, 1998, p. 83 [↑](#footnote-ref-458)
459. Elliston, 1998, p. 82 [↑](#footnote-ref-459)
460. Mackay, Judith *Global Sex: Sexuality and Sexual Practices Around the World,* Fifth Congress of the European Federation of Sexology, Berlin, http://www2.hu-berlin.de/sexology/ (June 30, 2000) [↑](#footnote-ref-460)
461. Robinson, V. (1997) ‘My baby just cares for me: Feminism, heterosexuality and non-monogamy’. *Journal of Gender Studies* Vol. 6 No. 4; Vangelisti AL. and Gerstenberger M. ‘Communication and marital infidelity’ in Dunscombe J, Harrison K, Allan G and Marsden D (eds.) *The State of Affairs: Explorations in Infidelity and Commitment.* Mahwah. NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. Also see: Kinsey et al. *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female.* Philadelphia: Saunders. (1953) They found that half of all married men and a quarter of all married women have committed adultery, p. 437 [↑](#footnote-ref-461)
462. Wasserstrom, Richard. ‘Is Adultery Immoral?’ in Baker, Robert B.; Elliston, Frederick A. And Winninger, Kathleen J. (Eds.) *Philosophy and Sex*. New York: Prometheus Books (1998) [↑](#footnote-ref-462)
463. Wasserstrom, 1998, p. 164 [↑](#footnote-ref-463)
464. Martin, 1998, p. 153 [↑](#footnote-ref-464)
465. Emens, 2004, p. 363 [↑](#footnote-ref-465)