‘Being in Love’:
An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Young Australians’ Romantic Experiences

Ler Ping Wee (Levan)

orcid.org/0000-0001-6840-8561

Submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 2017

School of Social and Political Sciences
University of Melbourne
Abstract

Romantic love touches and guides the intimate worlds of people every day. My thesis seeks to examine a popular experiential substrate of many Western romantic relationships – specifically, the feeling of ‘being in love’. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), this small-scale idiographic study focuses on the lives of four young Australians – all of whom profess to be in ‘truly loving’ partnerships with their ongoing beloveds. Multiple in-depth face-to-face interviews conducted over three years are the prime source of experiential data collection. My main research goal is to discover the shared qualities / meanings that interviewees themselves regard as defining facets of ‘being in love’. Inductive questions concerning their self-experiences, orientations towards partners, and other related existential enquiries are also explored.

Key findings suggest interviewees’ ‘ideal’ or optimal states of loving are primarily composed of coalescing perceptions of self-growth, friendship, attraction, altruism, and reciprocity. By contrast, ‘unideal’ or impoverished states of ‘being in love’ occur amidst sustained declines in one or more of these thematic experiences. Both ideal and unideal conditions are crucial to shaping their overall impressions of ‘real love’.

As per the directives of IPA research, all the above discoveries are examined in richly hermeneutic and phenomenological terms. Mark Johnson’s philosophy of embodiment is also applied – in particular, his notions of image schemas and non-dualistic processes of meaning-making. Together, this combination of IPA / Johnson allows me to uniquely explore interviewees’ senses of ‘being in love’ in corporeally-grounded, empathetic, and experientially nuanced ways that counteract current trends occurring in the social scientific literature.
Declaration

This is to certify that

I. the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD,

II. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

III. the thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables and bibliographies.

Ler Ping Wee (Levan)
Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the guiding force of my chief supervisor, Prof. Andrew Dawson. Thank you for your incredible support and insights over these four years, and for believing in my research from the very start. Your wisdom is unmatched. I would also like to thank my co-supervisor, Dr. Paul Green, for his wonderful assistance and invaluable input along the way. My appreciation goes out to Dr. Lauren Rosewarne. Thank you for being an amazing Committee Chairperson who never failed to offer her best encouragements. I want to moreover express my deepest gratitude to the four interviewees of my study. Your love stories are the life and heart of these pages.

Many thanks to my family and all my friends. Your steadfast faith in me inspired me to keep working harder, even on the toughest days. I am who I am because of all of you. I think it’s time to grab a coffee together after months of neglect.

A scholar on love should surely be in love. Olivia, your boundless affection and care imbue personal meaning to what I was trying to discover about others. You are my flame.

I would also like to thank Bobby. Your whinging was, oddly enough, greatly welcomed. Big hugs to my four cats Richard Parker, Bingo, Pudding, and Ebichu – felines who endured my erratic behaviours but love me anyway. Kind of.
Dedicated to my father.

Wish you were here.
# Table of Contents

Abstract
Declaration
Acknowledgements

1. Introduction
   1.1. Research Aims
   1.2. Thesis Structure

PART A

2. Literature Review
   2.1. Constructionist Accounts of ‘Disembodied Love’
   2.2. Social Scientists’ Intellectualist Bias Towards Love
   2.3. Macrosociological Theories on Love
   2.4. Conclusion

3. Mark Johnson’s Philosophy of Embodiment
   3.1. Misrecognitions of Western ‘Mind / Body’ Dualism: Towards Embodiment
   3.2. Exploring ‘Being in Love’ as Embodied Meaning

4. Methodology
   4.1. An Overview of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)
   4.2. Using IPA to Meet Research Aims and Redress Literature Trends
   4.3. Research Design
      4.3.1. Sampling Strategy and Frame
      4.3.2. Sampling Size
      4.3.3. Data Collection
      4.3.4. Data Analysis
      4.3.5. Writing the Thesis

5. Vignettes
   5.1. Dan
   5.2. Ben
   5.3. Fiona
   5.4. Rachel
PART B

6. Notes on Key Findings  

7. Self-Growth  
   7.1. Experiential Themes of Self-Growth  
   7.2. Image Schemas of Self-Growth  
   7.3. Cultural Meaning-Templates of Self-Growth  
   7.4. Conclusion  

8. Friendship  
   8.1. Experiential Themes of Friendship  
   8.2. Image Schemas of Friendship  
   8.3. Cultural Meaning-Templates of Friendship  
   8.4. Conclusion  

9. Attraction  
   9.1. Experiential Themes of Physical and Emotional Attraction  
   9.2. Image Schemas of Physical and Emotional Attraction  
   9.3. Cultural Meaning-Templates of Physical and Emotional Attraction  
   9.4. Conclusion  

10. Altruism  
    10.1. Experiential Themes of Altruism  
    10.2. Image Schemas of Altruism  
    10.3. Cultural Meaning-Templates of Altruism  
    10.4. Conclusion  

11. Reciprocity  
    11.1. Experiential Themes of Reciprocity  
    11.2. Image Schemas of Reciprocity  
    11.3. Cultural Meaning-Templates of Reciprocity  
    11.4. Conclusion  

12. Unideal Moments of ‘Being in Love’  
    12.1. Experiential Themes of Unideal Moments of ‘Being in Love’  
    12.2. Image Schemas of Unideal Moments of ‘Being in Love’  
    12.3. Cultural Meaning-Templates of Unideal Moments of ‘Being in Love’  
    12.4. Conclusion
PART C

13. Conclusion
   13.1. Summary of Key Findings 171
   13.2. Literature Trends Redressed: Contributions of this Study 177
   13.3. Limitations of this Study: Future Research Directions 181
   13.4. Final Words 185

Bibliography 186
List of Figures

| Figure 1: | CONTAINER image schema | 25 |
| Figure 2: | Each interviewee’s discernment of ‘truly being in love’ is made up of both his / her ‘ideal’ and ‘unideal’ experiences of the phenomenon. | 55 |
| Figure 3: | PATH image schema | 67 |
| Figure 4: | ATTRACTION image schema | 102 |
| Figure 5: | CENTRE-PERIPHERY image schema | 127 |
| Figure 6: | REMOVAL OF RESTRAINT image schema | 128 |
1. Introduction

“I would like to talk about relationship, about what love is, about human existence in which is involved our daily living …”

(Krishnamurti 1973, p. 75)

Romantic love is a profound experience that flourishes the everyday lives of millions, if not billions, of people who believe in its reality. For many, it is key to leading a fulfilling and happy existence; a cherished yearning to have and to hold their chosen loved ones in an intimate journey of two. Love is to them a unifying bond that fills their hearts with the wildest of joys – yet, if gone awry, inflicts existential agonies and insecurities that cut deeper than most. This is a passion that is at once illuminative as it is elusive; an emotional cauldron of both dramatic and subtle moments. Amongst couples caught in its midst, to truly love a partner and be loved in return is to embrace each other’s irreplaceable individualities – a symbiotic cornerstone to a meaningful companionship.

It is the above vernacular belief in the supposed power of romantic love that spurs my interest – and I am not alone. Beginning in the mid-twentieth century, the last thirty years in particular has seen a steady surge of social scientists intrigued by this distinct form of human interaction (Felmlee & Sprecher 2007, p. 389; Hatfield, Bensman & Rapson 2011, p. 144; Karandashev 2015, p. 3). Of course, academic approaches to studying this phenomenon have varied. For instance, social psychologists have over the years tried to construct numerous so-called ‘love scales’ designed to empirically measure various aspects of people’s romantic feelings (Hatfield, Bensman & Rapson 2011; eds Sternberg & Weis 2006). Others adopt more sociological (Felmlee & Sprecher 2007, p. 397-401), anthropological (Lindholm 2006; Venkatesan et al. 2011), and philosophical methods (Soble 2008), amongst other disciplines. Yet, whatever the school of thought, one thing is clear: far from being seen as a luxurious pastime, romantic love is now a lively topic of fascination for scholars keen on unravelling its many experiential mysteries and intricacies. It is within this burgeoning field that I, too, shall offer my own contributions.
1.1. Research Aims

Unlike many scholars before me, I do not seek to examine romantic love in its broadest conceptual sense. Instead, my specific focus lies with exploring what is often thought to be a key experiential condition or substrate of most Western intimate relationships – namely, the feeling of ‘being in love’ with someone.

Utilising Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009), this small-scale idiographic study is based on in-depth face-to-face interviews conducted with four young Australians over a span of three years – all of whom profess to be in ‘truly loving’ romantic relationships with ongoing partners. Whilst personal differences are covered, the main aim of my inductive research is to discover and describe the shared qualities / meanings that interviewees themselves come to see as defining aspects of ‘being in love’. This involves pursuing a host of open-ended questions, including: how do interviewees distinguish this phenomenon from other types of experiences (i.e. what makes ‘being in love’ unique in their eyes)? How do such feelings affect them (i.e. self-conceptions, existential states, etc.) and their orientations towards beloveds (i.e. how they relate with them)? What experiential conditions lead to optimal moments of ‘being in love’, and conversely, what causes their impoverishment? Prime exploratory focus is placed on identifying enduring qualitative themes, imaginings, perceptions, etc. that seem to persist for interviewees throughout the duration of this research.

These sensitising queries and more will be looked at through the lenses of phenomenology and hermeneutics, as infused within the general approach of IPA. Within this framework, I wish to clarify that I have no intentions to impose any moral judgments on the supposed ‘right’ or ‘real’ ways to ‘be in love’. Rather, my humbler goal is to empathetically explore, for its own sake, everyday experiences of this phenomenon via “trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 3). I also utilise Mark Johnson’s (1987, 2007) non-dualistic philosophy of embodiment – in particular, his notion of image schemas. His work assists me in examining ‘being in love’ as a corporeally-grounded phenomenon that emerges through the creative and structuring capacities of interviewees’ culturally-situated bodies. On a scholarly level, this study is partly meant to be a strategic response
to a number of prevalent trends happening amidst our current social scientific knowledge on love – to be briefly mentioned below and further elaborated on in the literature review (see Chapter 2).

1.2. Thesis Structure

This thesis is divided into three main parts. Part A contains the literature review, an overview of Johnson’s embodied philosophy, the methodology section, and interviewee vignettes. In the literature review, I highlight three salient theoretical / methodological trends amongst ‘love scholars’ that, in my opinion, have inhibited us from achieving a more embodied, inclusive, and micro-analytical understanding of the phenomenon (including the substrate of ‘being in love’). I then go on to outline core aspects of Johnson’s thinking before discussing how his material-centric ontology allows me to redress issues relating to the first literature trend – namely, the abundance of constructionist accounts on love that ignore the role of the body vis-à-vis meaning-making processes. The subsequent methodology section gives a general overview of IPA, along with my rationale for selecting specific strategies and methods for this study (e.g. sampling size, data collection / analysis, etc.). This is coupled with an explanation of how my research design, in tandem with Johnson’s philosophy, will help me equipoise the second and third literature trends – specifically, scholars’ intellectualist bias towards love’s definitions / experiential qualities, and macrosociological theories on the phenomenon that lack idiographic detail. The vignettes offer brief glimpses into interviewees’ backgrounds and ‘love lives’, providing some biographical context to the proceeding sections.

Part B focuses on key research findings. It starts with an outline of my preferred ways for readers to engage with presented discoveries. Five lengthy chapters follow, each detailing what I interpret from interviewees’ responses to be the dominant shared qualities (i.e. super-ordinate themes) that, experienced together, partly shape their ideal (i.e. optimal) moments of ‘being in love’. These qualities are ‘self-growth’, ‘friendship’, ‘attraction’, ‘altruism’, and ‘reciprocity’. A sixth chapter covers interviewees’ unideal (i.e. impoverished) loving instances due to a perceived lack in one or more of the above five qualities. Within the same discussion, I examine how both ideal and unideal states are in fact crucial to interviewees’ overall impressions of ‘truly being in love’.
Part C – the conclusion – presents a succinct roundup of my major experiential observations. I also discuss how my IPA / Johnson-inspired study contributes useful insights that partly help to fill in the knowledge gap engendered by the aforesaid social scientific trends. Limitations of the present research design and potential future directions / improvements are also considered.
PART A

2. Literature Review
3. Johnson’s Philosophy of Embodiment
4. Methodology
5. Vignettes
2. Literature Review

“The question of love is one that cannot be evaded. Whether or not you claim to be interested in it, from the moment you are alive you are bound to be concerned with love, because love is not just something that happens to you: It is a certain special way of being alive.”

(Merton 2002, p. 27)

Social scientists have become increasingly allured by the many complexities that mould Western notions of romantic love. Whilst earlier scholars overlooked the phenomenon as being too ‘personal’ or ‘private’ for rigorous analysis (Jackson 1993, p. 201), more recent researchers now recognise it as a driving dynamic of social life. For example, Luhmann – a sociologist – envisions love as a unique “medium of communication … [that is] societally differentiated and institutionalized with regard to its special particularity and specific function” (2010, p. 2). Meanwhile, Alberoni sees ‘falling in love’ as a powerful collective movement capable of “transform[ing] the beloved and, more profoundly, both lovers into something different and extraordinary” (1983, p. 6). Speaking in anthropological terms, Lindholm professes that “the [Western] romantic ideal … has steadily gained more and more currency internationally” (2006, p. 5), colouring the interactions of young individuals across Pakistan, China, Polynesia, Malawi, and numerous other regions. Theorists such as Bauman (2003), Giddens (1992), and Illouz (1997), to name but a few, have also expressed varying opinions on the structural trends shaping people’s loving experiences. In short, many scholars now befittingly value love as a topic worthy of serious academic enquiry, not simply a trivial or superfluous affair.

Yet, amidst this blossoming curiosity, a knowledge gap still exists in our current social scientific literature on romantic love. I contend this lacuna is symptomatic of three prevalent (and often interlacing) theoretical / methodological trends that, together, have kept us from achieving a more thoroughgoing grasp of this phenomenon. These trends include: 1) an abundance of constructionist

---

1 This chapter does not aim to provide a detailed breakdown of each mentioned scholar’s work. Instead, the purpose here is to paint an overarching view of some dominant trends occurring within the field of love-related studies. Doing so allows me to better illustrate the intended contributions of my own research. Readers may wish to refer to the Bibliography as a starting point for sourcing specific theories, arguments, narratives, etc.
accounts that downplay – or outright ignore – the centrality of the human body in love’s meaningful constitution, 2) scholars’ habits of imposing their intellectualist bias to propagate ‘ivory-towered’ definitions and / or highly selective aspects of romantic love, and 3) macrosociological theories that sacrifice experiential / biographical nuance in the interest of positing causal, nomothetic explanations.²

At this juncture, I wish to clearly state that I do not see any of these trends as erroneous or problematic in and of themselves. On the contrary, social scientists who fall within them have contributed immensely in some form or another to our growing scholastic appreciation of this distinct human relation. However, as Averill states:

Love (of whatever variety one might consider) is a complex syndrome composed of many component processes. These components may differ in the extent to which they are determined by biological, psychological, and social factors, but no component by itself is a necessary or sufficient condition for the entire syndrome. (1985, p. 94)

This literature review thus seeks to reveal how certain popular approaches amongst academics, whilst insightful, have hitherto left particular components of romantic love under-explored.³ I will now elaborate on each of these trends, orienting their entailing discussions towards my aim to develop a more body-focused, multi-voiced, and contextualised exploration of the phenomenon – with special respects to ‘being in love’.

2.1. Constructionist Accounts of ‘Disembodied Love’⁴

Initiated by the ‘linguistic’ or ‘discursive turn’ of the 1960s (Yilmaz 2007, p. 272), scholars inspired by the tradition of social constructionism occupy a large part of the literature on love (Felmlee & Sprecher 2007, p. 399) and other emotions (McCarthy 1994, p. 267). Variations

---

² All three trends largely centre on the general concept of romantic love, not necessarily ‘being in love’ per se. However, most scholars that fall within them tend to subsume the latter as part of the former (explicitly or via allusions). As such, I have taken these trends to be equally relevant to my specific area of experiential focus.

³ In this regard, I stress that I am not trying to overhaul these trends in any major way. In fact, a few of their core assumptions (e.g. cultural influences on people’s perceptions of love, etc.) have been partially built into my research design. Nonetheless, whilst leaning on certain similar premises, my study is guided by motives notably different from most previous applications. This will be further explained in proceeding sections and chapters.

⁴ Social constructionism is an exceedingly broad approach with diverse positions / methodologies. As such, there is “no one feature, which would be said to [precisely] identify a social constructionist position” (Burr 2003, p. 2) – although a few common characteristics exist (see Burr 2003; Gergen 2009). That being said, I invite readers to regard the following observations as specifically centered on constructionist accounts of love which, for the most part, have tended to bypass the kinds of bodily concerns I will now outline.
notwithstanding, this broad approach basically asserts that “love is a social construction” (Beall & Sternberg 1995, p. 419) – but what does this imply? Ushered into mainstream social science by Berger & Luckmann (1966), social constructionism asserts that “our ways of understanding the world do not come from objective reality” (Burr 2003, p. 7; see also Beall & Sternberg 1995, p. 419). Instead, what we feel to be ‘real’ is epistemically formed via our knowledge of various languages and a taken-for-granted acceptance of “the conceptual frameworks and categories used by the people in our culture [that] already exist” (Burr 2003, p. 7; see also Gergen 2009; Lock & Strong 2010). In this sense, reality is not absolute but is relative across “different societies and different cultures [that] have their own understandings of the world” (Beall & Sternberg 1995, p. 419).

Extending from this core position, love is thus thought to be ‘socially constructed’ insofar as:

We create for ourselves a sense of what our emotions are, of what being ‘in love’ is. We do this by participating in sets of meanings constructed, interpreted, propagated and deployed throughout our culture, through learning scripts, positioning ourselves within discourses, constructing narratives of self. We make sense of feelings and relationships in terms of love because a set of discourses around love pre-exists us as individuals and through these we have learnt what love means. (Jackson 1993, p. 212)

From this standpoint, the phenomenon operates as a kind of collective ideal (conditional to varying milieus) that achieves its genesis, reiteration, and revision via the dynamic spread of societal norms, values, labelling processes, “emotional dictionaries” (Hochschild 1998, p. 6), etc. This proliferation often – but not always – occurs on an implicit and uncritical level, sustained by everyday persons who come to conceive, communicate, and experience their loving feelings by way of their natural socialisations and cultural participations within their given environments (Beall & Sternberg 1995). To this degree, romantic love – whilst enjoying a paradigmatic status (Averill 1985, p. 93) – is never fully a ‘one-size-fits-all’ occurrence. Rather, it is a highly contextualised “personal construct, a social category, and cultural idea” (Karandashev 2017, p. 37) to which “if two people have different definitions of love, they will experience love differently” (Beall & Sternberg 1995, p. 419).

Constructionist approaches to studying love are very diverse. Some scholars, such as Beall & Sternberg (1995) and Jackson (1993), are mostly concerned with delineating what it actually means to say that love is socially constructed (i.e. theoretical clarifications, formative processes, etc.). Others focus on exploring the implications of love’s constructed state vis-à-vis various social
movements and conditions. Illouz (1997), for instance, examines how traditional romantic ideals have become excessively commodified amidst capitalistic trends, whilst Bellah et al. (1996) analyse the conflicts between conceptions of love’s givingness and self-indulgent individualism. Further examples of constructionist-inspired views can be seen in the works of Averill 1985, Coontz 2006, Dion, KK & Dion, KL 1996, Karandashev 2017, Person 1992, and Soloski et al. 2013, to name but a few. These studies do not always share the same agenda, neither do all their authors specifically declare themselves as social constructionists per se. Nonetheless, a major ‘family resemblance’ (Burr 2003, p. 2; see also Lock & Strong 2010, p. 6) that unites them is the methodological belief that love’s complex meanings are best inspected via a systematic ‘deconstruction’ of the cultural languages, discourses, images, concepts, ideals, texts, etc. that, together, empower the phenomenon as a distinct realm of human knowledge and experience (see Belli, Harré & Íñiguez 2010; Burr 2003; ed. Harré 1986).

This constructionist perspective on love has invigorated the literature in many ways. For example, amidst a booming appreciation of cultural relativism (Bur 2003, p. 3-4), recent social scientists have explored many epistemic varieties of the phenomenon – for instance, their discoveries on the differences between Asians’ and Americans’ constructed notions of romantic relationships (e.g. Dion, KK & Dion, KL 1996; Gao 2001; Kline, Horton & Zhang 2008; Shiota et al. 2010). Other authors – such as Ackerman (1994), Giddens (1992), and Kaufmann (2011) – sketch sweeping epochal accounts of Western love, each paying attention to historical discursive changes that have supposedly impacted how we experience our present-day intimacies. Furthermore, by adopting a “critical stance towards our taken-for-granted ways of understanding” (Burr 2003, p. 2), many scholars have opened the ideological floodgates against certain questionable aspects of love’s construction. This is exemplified by Friedman’s (2003) feminist critiques of patriarchal love norms and Kipnis’ (2003) scathing rejection of the phenomenon’s alleged uniformity. Again, whilst diverse approaches and methods are employed, all these works share a common interest in examining the assumed links between shared knowledges on love (via words, concepts, categories, etc.) and the lived realities and experiences they are thought to inspire (see Burr 2003, p. 21).

I share Burr’s sentiments in that “it is quite possible that I will be guilty of labelling as ‘social constructionist’ writers who would not wish to be labelled as such” (2003, p. 1). However, it is my rationale that the authors I have listed here display habits of advocating and furthering some of the school’s common suppositions, consciously or otherwise. Based on this, I have chosen to include them within my loose grouping.
However, despite many contributions, I suggest *constructionism’s near-exclusive attention to language and discourse has led to the unfortunate ‘disappearance of bodies’ within such explorations of love*. As Cromby & Nightingale explain:

Bodies are difficult to find in social constructionism, which tends to dismiss the body while simultaneously appearing to address it by providing detailed analysis of the discourses of bodily matters … *In continually either ignoring the body or treating it as mere metaphor or text, social constructionism obscures and downplays the significance of its functional, physiological, hormonal, anatomical, and phenomenological aspects … It then has little choice but implicitly to reduce the speaking bodies we meet and find ourselves to be to mere discursive traces, transcribed echoes of their actual fleshy substance … In ignoring the extensive evidence that the body’s biological and physiological substrate differentially acts back upon or interacts with socially obtained discourses, constructionism has implicitly adopted a ‘uniform plasticity’ of the human body.* (1999, p. 10-11) [emphasis added]

Contra to this constructionist marginality, the authors argue that bodies are in fact pivotal to our myriad perceptions of the world, insofar as “it is a biological machine that provides the material preconditions for subjectivity, thought, emotion, and language” (Cromby & Nightingale 1999, p. 10). That is to say, *it is our corporealities and our various bodily enablements (e.g. sensorial perceivers, physiological movements, brains, etc.) that, ipso facto, capacitates us in experiencing and enacting these crucial aspects of human life*. In addition, Cromby & Nightingale argue that “materiality matters because it both creates possibilities for, and puts constraints upon, the social constructions by and through which we live our lives” (1999, p. 12). This point applies not only to our actual physical environments from which constructions occur within, but also alludes to how “the centrality of human embodiment directly influences what and how things can be meaningful for us” (Johnson 1987, p. xix). For example, public discourses on ‘power’ and ‘power struggles’ are often conceptually reliant on figurative notions of relational forces (e.g. two opposing sides pushing / pulling each other) (Karlberg 2005). Yet, looking deeper, we begin to realise that *such abstract meanings are only understandable to us because of our precursive bodily grasps of literal forces that act upon and emanate from us*. Without such primordial encounters, *any creative / imaginative references to forces would be utterly incomprehensible, since we would lack the experiential structures from which we can make meaningful sense of them* (see Johnson 1987, 2007). In this respect, social constructionism – in treating our bodies as mere passive receivers of discursive inscription – effectively glosses over the crucial roles our fleshy dispositions play in the active creation of human knowledge and experience.
This constructionist tendency to downplay human bodies vis-à-vis processes of meaning-making is reflected across many love-related studies. For instance, Gottschall & Nordlund’s enquiry into the possible cultural universality of Western love is fueled by their textual analysis of romantic folktales that are taken to “give valuable information about the ideas, beliefs, dreams, wishes, and fears of people around the world” (2008, p. 160). In fairness, the authors make efforts to question the legitimacy of “overstated references … [that suggest] human thought and emotion are solely or mainly determined by language” (Gottschall & Nordlund 2008, p. 166). However, they themselves do little to go beyond their immediate concern with discursive ‘keywords’ of love (Gottschall & Nordlund 2008, p. 162) – to which the formative character of human bodies is neglected. A similar kind of material oversight is seen in Bachen & Illouz’s efforts to identify “some of the basic images, symbols, and scripts (event sequences) that orient young people’s romantic imagination and guide the way they think of typical romantic encounters” (1996, p. 280). Their belief is that people’s romantic imaginations are composed of “socially produced and culturally patterned meanings that can be identified by parsing the imagination into basic cognitive units” (Bachen & Illouz 1996, p. 280). Yet, once more, they offer no direct discussion of how bodies are dynamically embedded amidst such meaning-making processes – even as these supposed ‘cognitive units’ are ironically explored via their participants’ responses to physical depictions of love (e.g. smiling, kissing, etc.).

Put simply, the above and other constructionist studies are prone to examining love as a strictly ideational phenomenon made up of language, discourse, symbols, etc. – whilst simultaneously relegating our bodies to docile canvases for cultures to impose their ‘disembodied’ meanings upon (see Burkitt 2002; Cromby & Nightingale 1999; Scheper-Hughes & Lock 1987). As echoed by Lyon, who speaks of emotions\(^6\) in general:

\[\text{In constructionist treatments, emotion is generally understood in primarily ideational terms, i.e. as a cognitive or mental phenomenon which is subject to cultural production … [I do not] deny the importance of culture in the experience of emotion, through its conception and expressive forms, and in behaviour … [However] the exploration of the influence of culture in these is neither the beginning nor the end of the matter. (1995, p. 248)}\]

\(^6\) Whilst scholars like Burkitt (2002, p. 158-160) treat love as an ‘emotion’, others disagree (e.g. Averill 1985, Ekman 1992, Kemper 1987, Oatley & Johnson-Laird 1987). Whatever the pedantic categorisation, the key point to note is that constructionist-inspired studies on love are inclined to overlook bodies in very similar ways to those that deal more broadly with emotions.
Burkitt refines this view, saying:

Emotions are complexes because they are products of both the body and discourse yet are reducible to neither … This leads to a larger point that I want to make, which is that emotion is composed of both the material and the ideal – of both matter and meaning within the context of cultural relations. Because of this, body and mind, emotion and consciousness must also be seen as interrelated phenomena, the one contained within the other. (2002, p. 153)

To this end, I suggest constructionist treatments of love – which make up a sizeable portion of the present literature – have thus far mostly bypassed two major bodily dimensions of the phenomenon. These dimensions relate to: 1) the fundamental structuring powers of our physical bodies that enable us to comprehend, perpetuate, and also delimit social constructions of love, and 2) common bodily expressions of love (e.g. embraces, caresses, etc.) which lived meanings are heavily owed to our perceiving materialities. Of course, these corporeal components do not construe the entirety of the phenomenon (nor its conceived substrate, ‘being in love’). However, as my own study aims to address, these are integral aspects to examine that – alongside (rather than opposed to) constructionist accounts – will help us achieve a more ‘fleshed out’ understanding of such experiences.

2.2. Social Scientists’ Intellectualist Bias Towards Love

A second trend permeating the literature on love centers on scholars’ intellectualist bias – yet, what does this term suggest? As explained by Bourdieu:

One of the chief sources of error in the social sciences resides in an uncontrolled relation to the object [of analysis] which results in the projection of this relation onto the object … People whose profession it is to objectivize the social world prove so rarely able to objectivize themselves, and fail so often to realize that what their apparently scientific discourse talks about is not the object but their relation to the object. (1992, p. 68-69) [emphasis added]

He thus defines an ‘intellectualist bias’ as:

… the invisible determinations inherent in the intellectual posture itself, in the scholarly gaze that he or she casts upon the social world … [This] intellectualist bias consists in forgetting to inscribe into the theory we build of the social world the fact that it is the product of a theoretical gaze, a ‘contemplative eye’ … [and an] ‘ethnocentrism of the scientist’, which consists in ignoring everything that the analyst injects into his [her] perception of the object by virtue of the fact that he [she] is [supposedly] placed outside of the object, that he observes it from afar and from above. (Bourdieu 1992, p. 69-70; see also Bourdieu 1990) [emphasis added]
In simpler terms, a scholar’s intellectualist bias lies with his / her habits of imposing (purposefully or otherwise) his / her values, beliefs, dispositions, etc. onto an object of study – to which such acts of power are mostly rendered invisible⁷ amidst academia’s privileged social standing and its strivings for so-called ‘objectivity’ (see Bourdieu 1992, p. 70; Eagleton-Pierce 2009, p. 119; Kenway & McLeod 2004, p. 529).

Scholastic self-reflexivity and power disclosures have become far more common since Bourdieu’s initial claims – especially within qualitative research (see eds Finlay & Gough 2003; Mruck & Breuer 2003). Nonetheless, I contend an intellectualist bias still runs through a good portion of our present academic understanding of love, manifesting in a few discreet ways. One such way centers on social scientists’ habits of presupposing and promoting their own ‘ivory-towered’ (and at times, moralistic) definitions of what love ‘really is’ or ‘ought to be’. Take for example Jankowiak & Fischer’s (1992) often-cited anthropological study. Their research goal is to explore the potential ubiquitousness of love across cultures. Perusing various ethnographic and folklore texts, the authors claim to have detected the existence of romantic ideals in 147 out of 166 sampled cultures. This compels them to value the phenomenon as “a human universal, or at the least a near-universal” (Jankowiak & Fischer 1992, p. 154).

What concerns me here is not Jankowiak & Fischer’s findings per se, but rather, how their analytical conclusions are drawn (see also Venkatesan et al. 2011, p. 215-216). In particular, they explain that evidence of love in each culture is drawn from their personal detections of one or more of the following indicators:

1. accounts depicting personal anguish and longing,
2. the use of love songs or folklore that highlight the motivations behind romantic involvement,
3. elopement due to mutual affection,
4. native accounts affirming the existence of passionate love, and
5. the ethnographer’s affirmation that romantic love is present. (Jankowiak & Fischer 1992, p. 152)

⁷ Appropriating Schmid, I believe this invisibility is partly achieved through many scholars’ abundant uses of ‘shell’ or abstract nouns (e.g. ‘love’) that work to “trick their hearers into the unfounded belief that certain pieces of information do not require particular attention or even reflection” (2001, p. 1548). This in turn helps their wielders render authority by “sell[ing] their own personal views and opinions as objective truths and facts” (Schmid 2001, p. 1545).
All of this raises many curious questions. For starters, why did the authors choose to align romantic love primarily with anguish and longing and not, say, joy or happiness? Why is the phenomenon so specifically limited to an “initial phase of involvement (i.e. less than two years)” (Jankowiak & Fischer 1992, p. 151) – and no time beyond? How exactly did they arrive at their terse definition of love as “any intense attraction that involves the idealization of the other, within an erotic context, with the expectation of enduring for some time into the future” (Jankowiak & Fischer 1992, p. 150)?

These types of probing enquiries lend weight to the idea that studies such as theirs are implicitly propelled by a concealed intellectualist bias. In this case, the bias lies with Jankowiak & Fischer’s privileged abilities in quietly construing what is essentially their own emic views of love into ‘epistemic measurements’ of its etic occurrence (see Morris et al. 1999). This allows them to propagate their personally preferred definitions, closed concepts, etc. even before proceeding with their esoteric research observations. Indeed, apart from brief references to a few other scholars’ works, the authors provide no detailed reasons as to why and how some indicators were chosen over others – merely stating the authority of their “subjective appraisal” (Jankowiak & Fischer 1992, p. 154). Despite this, it is interesting to note that, since their original publication, Jankowiak & Fischer’s findings on love have often been treated by other social scientists as taken-for-granted ‘facts’ – with minimal questioning of their core assumptions (Venkatesan et al. 2011, p. 216).

Intellectualist bias also manifests amidst scholars’ inclinations to home in on highly selective aspects of love, primarily as a means of evidencing their preceding theories and claims. For example, in her book Why Love Hurts, Illouz’s asserts:

> When [romantic] relationships do get formed, agonies do not fade away, as one may feel bored, anxious, or angry in them; have painful arguments and conflicts; or, finally, go through the confusion, self-doubts, and depression of break-ups or divorces … The search for love is an agonizingly difficult experience from which few modern men and women have been spared. If the sociologist could hear the voices of men and women searching for love, s/he would hear a long and loud litany of moans and groans. (2012, p. 3)

Once more, we see how a scholar’s emic views on love are implicitly transformed into broad etic claims that, supposedly, speak on behalf of countless ‘non-sociological’ others. In this case, it is

---

8 In fairness, unlike Jankowiak & Fischer (1992), Illouz (2012) does take extra steps to directly consult the opinions of ‘laypersons’ via qualitative interviews. However, her intention seems mostly geared towards using certain responses as evidence for her pre-planned hypothesis on ‘romantic suffering’.
abundantly clear that Illouz does not intend to explore the wider experiential spectrum of the phenomenon ‘as it is lived’ by people (including its more celebrated traits). Instead, she chooses to specifically focus on painful and pessimistic aspects of love that, as she asserts, are created by the “social and cultural tensions and contradictions that have come to structure modern selves and identities” (Illouz 2012, p. 4). Not surprisingly, this discriminating outlook happens to fit into her academic ambitions to “identify the institutional causes for romantic misery” (Illouz 2012, p. 6) – a sociological goal also reflected across her prior works (see Illouz 1997, 2007). Interestingly, Illouz does fleetingly acknowledge her own skewed agenda, saying “there [are] many modern forms of happy love … [but] I did not write about them because unhappiness more urgently demands a scholar’s attention” (2012, p. 239; see also Klesse 2014, p. 224-226). In many ways, her self-admitted intellectualist bias exemplifies social scientists’ general proneness to “not feel comfortable studying love per se … often [only] studying what happens when love is deficient, thwarted, warped or absent” (Ackerman 1994, p. xxii).9 To this degree, Illouz’s “deliberate decision to focus on certain aspects of [the] phenomenon and to ignore others” (2012, p. 240) is symptomatic of many scholars’ privileges in ‘cherry-picking’ their preferred (and often disparaging) dimensions of love. They do this not to describe its experiential diversity ‘for its own sake’, but rather, as an implicit strategy to affirm the veracity of their pre-determined social scientific projects.

Jankowiak & Fischer (1992) and Illouz (2012) are not the only wielders of intellectualist bias. Other social scientists – including Buss (2006), Fehr & Russell (1991), Hendrick, C & Hendrick SS (2006), to name but a few (see Hatfield, Bensman & Rapson 2011) – have each approached their studies on love with presupposed esoteric definitions / categories to meet their empirical agendas. Meanwhile, theorists – such as Bauman (2003) and Lasch (1997), amongst many others – also tend to posit mostly pessimistic views on the phenomenon, often treating it as a mere linchpin concept for holding together their already-conceived scholastic objectives. In light of this, I want to stress that these kinds of accounts have indeed generated numerous newfound insights into love’s complex nature – to which they should be appreciated for. However, at the same time,

---

9 Madison expresses a similar point, observing the “scholarly tendency to put love in a toolbox of modernist social theorising or philosophising, tagging on negative labels of ‘risk’, ‘fear’, and ‘uncertainty’, without further question” (2008, p. 293).
many appear to be driven by a discreet intellectualist bias that empowers scholars to *preemptively* frame love in ways they deem most suitable to their own needs.

To be clear, it is impossible for any scholar to fully abstain from intellectualist bias, since every produced work is inevitably shaped by our habitus (see Bourdieu 1977). This includes my current thesis, wherein the chosen research goals, theoretical framework, methodology, etc. are all – to some extent or another – inspired by my personal preferences and assumptions (see Baker & Gentry 2006). However, that being said, I contend there remains a prime opportunity to partly loosen the reins of academic privilege by *proceeding* with a more reactive – and less presumptuous – attitude of open discovery. Specifically, this would involve: 1) developing a more inclusive, multi-voiced, and empathetic approach to the study of love that, as best as possible, minimises presupposed scholastic definitions and / or experiential delimitations, and 2) situating love as a central topic of inductive enquiry that is examined on its own terms – not simply a convenient means of ‘proving’ assigned social scientific concepts and arguments.

### 2.3. Macrosociological Theories on Love

A third and very closely related trend pertains to the *profusion of macrosociological theories heavily focused on identifying the expansive historical, cultural, political, and / or economic forces that shape people’s understandings of love*. By definition, such types of theories are based on “a loose but commonly used distinction … that [involves] analy[sing] social systems or populations on a large scale or a high level of abstraction” (Calhoun 2002, p. 287). In more precise terms, Nolan & Lenski explain this approach as being:

> ... focused on human societies themselves. Although it ... is concerned with individuals, families, classes, social problems, and all the other parts and features of societies, it analyzes them in relation to the larger social systems – the societies – of which they are a part. (2015, p. 5)

---

10 For instance, my decision to adopt Smith, Flowers & Larkins’ (2009) Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and Johnson’s philosophy of embodiment (1987, 2007) (to be discussed) is arguably a form of intellectualist bias, given that I have chosen to rely on and forward their epistemological / ontological assumptions. Nonetheless, contra to most studies mentioned, this merged framework is largely used by me as a starting point for *flexibly inductive (rather than deductive / reductive) discoveries on ‘being in love’*. 

16
Many macrosociological studies on love exist.\textsuperscript{11} For instance, Giddens broadly observes how the late modernist spread of egalitarian ideals and detraditionalisation has brought about the emergence of ‘pure relationships’ (1992, p. 58). No longer bound to outmoded 18\textsuperscript{th} century notions of ‘romantic love’, people are now free to partake in democratic exchanges of intimacy that, subject to interpersonal negotiations, are only conditionally upheld “until further notice” (1992, p. 63). Meanwhile, both Bauman (2003) and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (1995) each examine how a recent societal shift towards individualism has turned ‘true love’ into a precarious balancing act between the quest for personal freedom and the sustained hope of forming co-dependent intimate partnerships. Concerning structural gender issues, Cancian opines on the historical ‘feminisation’ of love in the US that has led many people to believe that “women are much more capable of love than men and that the way to make relationships more loving is for men to become more like women” (1986, p. 692). Other scholars – for instance, Boden & Williams (2002), Cherlin (2010), Coontz (2006), Kaufmann (2011), Shumway (2003), amongst others – all posit their own macrosociological observations on the phenomenon, albeit with diverse areas of focus and varying conclusions (see Felmlee & Sprecher 2007, p. 397-401).

Such theories have contributed immensely to the literature on love. To begin with, these authors are able to step back from the particularities of micro cases to sketch a ‘big picture’ view on how “love has considerable macrolevel, social structural implications for societies” (Felmlee & Sprecher 2007, p. 397). This is an important agenda that, in some cases, involves tracing “the whole history that has made love what it is today” (Kaufmann 2011, p. 6) so that we are better able to grasp the conditions that now colour public conceptions of this distinct phenomenon. Macrosociological observations have also been useful in exposing “the enduring inequalities inherent in the experience of love in our society … [thus] represent[ing] a powerful critique of our societal structure and the obstacles inherent in experiencing love in such a milieu” (Felmlee & Sprecher 2007, p. 400). Such knowledge in turn both informs and opens up assorted discourses regarding the moral and functional state of the phenomenon – whether they be with regards to ‘rescuing’ love from supposed impoverishment (e.g. Bauman 2003, Beck & Beck-Gernsheim

\textsuperscript{11} However, their authors do not always identify themselves as sociologists \textit{per se} – even as they adopt a distinctly macrosociological style of analysis.
institutional tensions in the fight for marriage equality (e.g. Hull 2006), modern expectations of romantic relationships (e.g. Hooks 2001), and so on.

However, whilst beneficial, these macrosociological theories have largely studied love on a nomothetic level, and are almost exclusively focused on locating the prime causes – rather than exploring the actual experiential nuances of – the phenomenon. To be clear, I strongly agree milieus and the broad impetuses that mould them do assert a profound influence on how people conceive, and hence, experience their loving emotions (see Beall & Sternberg 1995; Dion, KK & Dion, KL 1996; Swidler 2001). At the same time, such ‘top-down’ approaches often start with “methods and theories that reduce or simplify human experience in order to be parsimonious or rigorous” (Psathas 1973, p. 13). Thus, in trying to spot generalistic patterns of human thought and behaviour, these macrosociological theories prevailingly: 1) depict most experiences of love to be uniformly impacted by structural forces in near-identical ways, and 2) sidestep the many intricacies, complexities, and variations that make up a person’s biographically-enriched loving moments. This neglect of personal autonomy and contextualised detail is further exacerbated by the fact that “[macro]sociological research [on love] tends to … rely on very little [freshly collected] data for its arguments” (Felmlee & Sprecher 2007, p. 405). These types of studies are thus indicative of the “large literature on the nature of romantic relationships [that speaks of them] in the abstract” (Scheff 1997, p. 60), unsupported by first-hand idiographic accounts.

Bauman’s Liquid Love (2003) exemplifies these points. Voiced through his broader theory on ‘liquid modernity’ (Bauman 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2011), he posits that a pervasive sense of structural ‘rootlessness’ has compelled individuals to yearn for “durable, reliable framework[s] inside which a web of human interactions could be securely woven” (Bauman 2003, p. 91). However, the present “frailty, sickliness, and vulnerability of personal partnerships” (Bauman 2003, p. 91) means that love is now a battlefield of insecurity, whereupon “if you know that your partner may opt out at any moment, with or without your agreement … investing your feelings into the current relationship is always a risky trap” (Bauman 2003, p. 90). This is worsened by a

---

12 This observation echoes what was mentioned of the second trend. However, the bigger focus here is on actual methodological applications, rather than presupposing scholastic dispositions (although the two facets are of course closely entwined).

13 Exceptions do exist, such as Illouz’s (1997) macrosociological research on consumerist culture and love that is partly evidenced through qualitative interviews she conducted. However, for the most part, these nomothetic theories on love tend to depend heavily on secondary texts / reports (e.g. books, newspapers, anecdotes, etc.) as sole support for their totalising assertions – without proactively seeking the opinions of ‘laypersons’.
consumerist culture that, in promoting individualistic wants and freedom of choice, has conditioned people to also treat their romantic relationships as opportunistic ‘return on investment’ commodities (Bauman 2003, p. 13-14). In sum, Bauman pessimistically declares that love – in its “pure, absolute form” (2003, p. 100) – is now a depleted utopia, supplanted by the plethoric risks and uncertainties that saturate our liquid modern world.

Again, Bauman’s conclusions per se are not my main concern. Instead, I merely wish to illustrate how his desire to sketch a far-reaching view of love and its broad causes has, in effect, led him to wash over the diversity of people’s romantic experiences. Bauman himself hints at the challenges of his macrosociological approach, stating:

> However big the thoughts may seem, they will never be big enough to embrace, let alone keep hold of, the bountiful prodigality of human experience. What we know, wish to know, struggle to know, must try to know about love … – can all that be streamlined, put in order, match the standards of consistency, cohesiveness and completeness set for the lesser matters? Perhaps it can – in the infinity of time, that is. (2003, p. 2)

Whilst I agree it is impossible to fully capture the vast spectrum of human experience, I suggest Bauman’s surfeit use of ‘big thoughts’ and abstract concepts – for example, ‘liquid modernity’ (2003, p. xiii), ‘consumerism’ (2003, p. 49), ‘individualized society’ (2003, p. 67), ‘risk’ (2003, p. 90) – only serves to pull us further away from the everyday “people who believe and experience romantic relationships to be of intimate importance to their lives” (Lindholm 1998, p. 247-248). Put differently, Bauman and other macrosociological theorists on love are usually too caught up with speaking about love in its most spacious and conceptual form. Yet, seldom do they take the effort to hunker down and micro-examine the idiographic ‘love lives’ of real persons whose multifarious experiences are what make up the phenomenon in the first place.¹⁴

In the wake of this trend, I opine there is an opportunity to re-approach the study of love in such a way as to “pay special attention to personal experience and understand it as a product of cultural, conceptual and historical forces without losing our sense of its intimacy” (Solomon 1994, p. 27).¹⁵ To achieve this goal, I propose a contextualised ‘bottom-up’ approach that first begins with a

---

¹⁴ To be clear, the literature does contain a respectable number of micro-analytical studies on love. However, these usually restrict their explorations of love to highly specific contexts – for instance, with regards to body image (e.g. Ambwani & Strauss 2007), cancer survivors (e.g. Carpenter & Fortenberry 2010), online dating (e.g. Close & Zinkhan 2004), familial bonds (e.g. Pembroke 2011), etc. Far less effort has been made to explore the phenomenon as it relates to the broader experiential ‘whole’ of people’s lives – which is a partial aim of my research.

¹⁵ Felmlee & Sprecher hold a complimentary view, expressing their desires to “see more integration of the two strands of social scientific research on love: the psychological and sociological” (2007, p. 404).
direct and close listening of people’s loving experiences. These qualitative accounts can then serve as a starting point for slowly identifying possible societal patterns and trends that might have partly conditioned their nuanced perceptions of love. As I will detail later, this approach would at least enroot any wider observations in the soil of human biographies, not simply lost in a morass of macrosociological abstractions.

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter has unpacked three salient and often interlacing theoretical / methodological trends that have led to a lacuna in the social scientific literature on love. They pertain to constructionist accounts that circumvent the role of living bodies in the formation of love’s meaning, scholars’ intellectualist bias in promoting ‘ivory-towered’ definitions / lopsided aspects of the phenomenon, and macrosociological studies that overlook idiographic attention. My next two chapters (i.e. Johnson’s Philosophy of Embodiment and the Methodology) will detail how I intend to fill in this current gap by flourishing a more corporeal, empathetic, and biographically-enriched understanding of this unique realm of human experience.
3. Mark Johnson’s Philosophy of Embodiment

“The body is our general medium for having a world.”
(Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 169)

This chapter gives an overview of Mark Johnson’s philosophy of embodiment. It covers his challenges against the traditional Western notion of ‘mind / body’ dualism, along with his proposal for a more embodied theory of meaning. His key concept of image schemas will also be explained (including their bodily, metaphorical, and cultural dimensions). Lastly, and most importantly, I outline how Johnson’s work will assist me in developing a novel corporeally-grounded understanding of ‘being in love’ that differs from the ideational analysis of most constructionist accounts (i.e. the first literature trend).

3.1. Misrecognition of Western ‘Mind / Body’ Dualism: Towards Embodiment

From the outset, Johnson contends that much of the Western world remains erroneously steeped in adherences to “mind/body dualism … [that has become] so deeply embedded in our philosophical and religious traditions” (2007, p. 2). Like many authors (e.g. Dempsey 2009; Mohammed 2012; Rozemond 1999; Scheper-Hughes & Lock 1987), he believes much of this tradition is owed to the lingering influence of 17th century French philosopher René Descartes who “argued that just by clear thinking, we can indubitably see that mind and body are two radically different and distinct kinds of thing” (Johnson 2007, p. 3). However, Johnson argues that this Cartesian ‘split’ has problematically “create[d] two fundamental gaps or splits in human experience, one ontological, the other epistemological” (1987, p. xxvi). As he explains:

First, on a Cartesian account, the body does not play a crucial role in human reasoning – rationality is essentially disembodied. Rationality may make use of material presented by the senses, but it is not itself an attribute of bodily substance. This gives rise to a basic ontological gulf between mind and body, reason and sensation … Second, there is an epistemological commitment that … what the mind knows are its own representations, or ideas [sans reliance on the body or materiality] … But this view of knowledge raises a serious difficulty: if what we know [from our mind alone] are our own ideas, then how can we ever be sure that they do indeed accurately represent what exists in external reality? (Johnson 1987, p. xxvi-xxvii)
Despite these issues, Johnson suggests that people’s persistent beliefs in ‘mind / body’ dualism come as no surprise given our bodies’ natural tendencies to hide themselves from active consciousness. This hiding is in part due to the general from-to nature of human perception that leads to the ‘focal disappearance’ of our sensorial organs amidst our experiences (Johnson 2007, p. 4). For instance, we are used to directing our attentions away from our physical parts (e.g. eyes, nose, etc.) towards what we are perceiving (e.g. objects, smells, etc.) – in effect, concealing the former from our conscious focus. In addition, Johnson proposes that much of our ‘body schema’ – specifically, our “system of sensory-motor capacities that function without awareness or the necessity of perceptual monitoring” (2007, p. 5) – further hides our bodies from us via ‘background disappearances’. For example, when we lift a cup, we seldom directly think about the many underlying physical adjustments and complex hand-eye coordinations that implicitly help us carry out this seemingly simple task. Other crucial “respiratory, digestive, cardiovascular, urogenital, and endocrine systems” (Johnson 2007, p. 6) also operate on a mostly discreet level – even as they provide the very physical conditions necessary for our existence. To this end, Johnson posits all these constant bodily hidings have lulled most everyday persons into feeling that “our thoughts, and even our feelings, go on somewhat independent of our bodily processes” (2007, p. 6) – thus perpetuating their faiths in ‘mind / body’ dualism.

However, Johnson argues that what we call ‘mind’ and ‘body’ are actually not two distinct and separate things to begin with. Using ideas from post-Husserlean phenomenology, he posits instead that both these supposed ‘substances’ are in fact merely abstract concepts that emerge from – thus, do not precede – our essential and indivisible states of embodiment (Johnson 2007, p. 11-12). He opines that, in the first place, “there is no radical mind/body separation” (Johnson 2007, p. 11) that somehow mysteriously yokes together to form a unified person. Instead, we are from the outset holistic – each with a brain within a body that interacts with our material and social environments via continuous (i.e. rather than dualistically ‘split’) experiential streams (Johnson 2007, p. 11). As such, rather than being grounded in any ontological reality, ‘mind / body’ dualism is simply one out of many possible imaginative propositions that we create for ourselves “for very specific

---

\[16\] That is, until some taken-for-granted bodily function goes awry (e.g. sudden feelings of indigestion, etc.).
purposes that we have in trying to make sense of our [ultimately embodied] experiences” (Johnson 2007, p. 11).17

Johnson develops his embodied philosophy via a further argument that all "meaning is grounded in our bodily experience" (2007, p. 12). He contrasts this simple yet profound idea with prevalent conceptual-propositional theories of language and mind. These theories imply that “sentences or utterances (and the words we use in making them) alone are what have meaning” (Johnson 2007, p. 8) – to which “our capacity to grasp meaning … [is] dependent on our conscious use of symbolic representations in the mind” (Johnson 2007, p. 8). However, Johnson argues that such explanations remain entrapped by “seriously mistaken claims that meaning and thought are exclusively conceptual and propositional in nature … [and are] not intrinsically shaped by the body, even if these processes have to occur in a body” (2007, p. 8). He clarifies that concepts / propositions do of course make up a sizable portion of how we understand the world around us (Johnson 2007, p. 8). Nonetheless, scholars that stick too exclusively to this conceptual-propositional model stay restricted to a dualistic mindset, and thus, “excludes (or at least hides) most of what [really] goes into the ways we make sense of our experience” (Johnson 2007, p. 9).

So, how do we actually comprehend meaning, if not solely through language and the mind? To this, Johnson responds with his own embodied theory of meaning that offers a more “naturalist view insofar as it situates meaning within a flow of experience that cannot exist without a biological organism engaging its environment” (2007, p. 10). In more specific terms, he states that:

... our experience of meaning is based, first on our sensorimotor experience, our feelings, and our visceral connections to our world; and, second, on various imaginative capacities for using sensorimotor processes to understand abstract concepts. Any adequate explanation of meaning must [thus] avoid attributing it to either ‘body’ or ‘mind’, for then we simply reproduce the dualism that is the source of the problem in the first place. (Johnson 2007, p. 11)

Inspired by Dewey, Johnson postulates that embodied meaning thrives on a flowing “principle of continuity” (2007, p. 10) that does not need to insert a Cartesian ‘split’ to explain how we make sense of the world. Instead, continuity suggests that ‘higher’ levels of meaning (e.g. propositions, concepts, reason, etc.) non-disruptively emerge and are organically comprehended from the

---

17 To be clear, Johnson (2007, p. 12) does not completely negate the possibility of disembodied ‘souls’ or ‘spirits’. He simply suggests that the meanings in our lives as we know them now (including what we call reason, imagination, language, etc.) are shaped via our irreducible embodiments, not from a post hoc ‘mind / body’ dualism.
‘bottom-up’ via our basic physical capacities and orientations (Johnson 2007, p. 11). Johnson thus devotes much of his philosophical energy to ‘digging deeper’ beneath words and sentences in search of corporeal processes of meaning-making often overlooked by most conceptual-propositional scholars.

One such meaning-making process centers on Johnson’s observations that “human bodily movement, manipulation of objects, and perceptual interactions involve recurring patterns without which our experience would be chaotic and incomprehensible” (1987, p. xix). Supported by empirical research, he refers to these patterns as ‘image schemas’ (Johnson 1987, p. 18-40) – a term initially inspired by Kant but appropriated for his own efforts (Johnson 1987, p. 19). As Johnson explains:

[Image schemas] are gestalt structures, consisting of parts standing in relations and organized into unified wholes, by means of which our experience manifests discernable order. When we seek to comprehend this order and to reason about it, such bodily based schematic play a central role. For although a given schema may emerge first as a structure of bodily interactions, it can be figuratively developed and extended as a structure around which meaning is organized at more abstract levels of cognition. This figurative extension and elaboration typically takes the form of metaphorical projection from the realm of physical bodily interactions onto so-called rational processes, such as reflection and the drawing of inferences from premises. (Johnson 1987, p. xix)

Expressed in a simpler way, image schemas are elementary, recurring, and nonpropositional structures of experience grounded in our bodily physicalities. These function as generic frameworks for the development of more complex and/or abstract forms of meaning – including concepts, reason, discourses, imagination, and so on (Johnson 1987, p. 28; see also Mandler & Cánovas 2014). To be clear, image schemas are not concrete or mental pictures per se (Johnson 1987, p. 2), but rather, have an experiential “generality that raises them a level above the specificity of particular rich images” (Johnson 1987, p. 24). They can also be structurally and creatively transposed across all our human senses (i.e. sight, sound, touch, etc.) in ways analogous to our bodily movements and interactions (Johnson 1987, p. 25; see also Gibbs & Colston 1995, p. 349). Images schemas are moreover irreducible gestalts in that “any given schema can … be analyzed and broken down simply because it has parts … [yet to do so] will destroy the integrity of the gestalt, that is, will destroy the meaningful unity that makes it the particular gestalt that it is” (Johnson 1987, p. 44). In addition, as much as they provide coherency and order to our experiences, image schemas can also constrain the kinds of meanings we are able to infer from the world around us (Johnson 1987, p. 41-64).
All the above points are best illustrated using Johnson’s own example. According to him, one of the most prevalent patterns of our bodily experiences is the CONTAINER image schema (Johnson 1987, p. 21). This is a basic organising structure we naturally become more and more aware of throughout our lives:

… because we must constantly interact with containers of all shapes and sizes … [to which] we naturally learn the ‘logic’ of containment (for the CONTAINER schema). Containers have at least the minimal structure of a boundary, an interior, and an exterior. Through many experiences each day, we learn what the word into means, as we encounter the movements of objects as they pass from the exterior of a container across or through its boundary, finally coming to rest in its interior. We know, in a bodily way, that something that is inside a container is not outside it. We learn that if something starts moving within a container toward its boundary and eventually crosses over the boundary, then it is at least temporarily outside the container. (Johnson 2007, p. 138; see Figure 1 below)

![Figure 1: CONTAINER image schema (Johnson 1987, p. 23)](image)

To better explain things, I will align this specific structure to the general qualities of image schemas discussed above. First, readers can observe how our very abilities to grasp simple CONTAINER notions of ‘in / out / boundaries’ are intimately dependent on our bodily activities across different situations. For instance, starting from infancy, we become increasingly aware of these experiential features via various physical activities (e.g. taking food / water into our bodies and passing them out, entering and exiting rooms or other boundaried areas, etc.) (Johnson 1987, p. 21). This knowledge is often, but not always, acquired on a ‘cognitively unconscious’ level (Lakoff & Johnson 2007, p. 9-15). Further to this, we can also observe that, although seemingly unrelated, all these tasks and similar others actually share the same underlying organising pattern shown in Figure 1. This illustrates the general transposability of the CONTAINER schema insofar as its structuring logic is not limited to a specific activity, but rather, functions as a recurring experiential framework that enables us to make sense of a wide range of ‘in / out / boundary’ related activities

---

18 This is a term first used by Lakoff & Johnson (1999, p. 9-15) to describe how most embodied persons tend to become aware of image schemas in a latent manner that lurks “beneath the level of our conscious awareness … without having to reflect upon it or think about it” (Johnson 2007, p. 139).
and movements. At the same time, this schema also constrains certain meaning-making possibilities. This does not imply that, for example, a box becomes utterly ‘meaningless’ without CONTAINMENT – merely that how we currently understand the object’s function and purpose would be altered from what it is now (e.g. a box would no longer be regarded as a CONTAINER with boundaries to put things inside or take them out of). Lastly, the CONTAINER schema is an irreducible gestalt of its own unique type to the extent that removing any of its formative parts (i.e. the internal, the external, and the barrier that divides them) will in effect collapse the relational structure that defines this embodied logic for what it is.

Johnson (1987, p. 65-100) further observes that we are wont (but not limited) to making imaginative use of metaphors to extend our embodied grasps of image schemas into more abstract forms of meaning. Here, he explains that metaphors are not merely limited to “linguistic expression (a form of words) used for artistic or rhetorical purposes” (Johnson 1987, p. 15). Rather, they are a creative “process by which we understand and structure one domain of experience in terms of another domain of a different kind” (Johnson 1987, p. xv). For instance, our preceding bodily learnings of CONTAINER subtends our capacities to “mark off a bounded mental space … [via] understand[ing] categories metaphorically as containers (where a thing falls within the container, or it does not)” (Johnson 1987, p. 39). This style of metaphorical extension colours many common meaning-frames ranging from classical ‘logical’ arguments – for instance, “everything is either P (in the category container) or not-P (outside the container)” (Johnson 1987, p. 39) – to more expressive ideas, such as “I am in trouble” (i.e. within a conceived realm of deviance), “this is outside my area of expertise” (i.e. external to personal skills), and so on. In short, metaphors reveal how our primordial embodied awareness of CONTAINER and other schemas can be extended ‘upwards’ to structure more complex notions that shape our overall “social, epistemic, and conversational or speech-act domains” (Johnson 1987, p. 63). Again, such meaning-making processes are a result of our continual, holistic organism-environment interactions – not from oddly disembodied minds able to comprehend things without any biological praxis whatsoever.

---

19 Metonyms are another style of imaginative projection, although “metaphor proves to be one of the better examples of imaginative schematic operations” (Johnson 1987, p. 100).
The CONTAINER image schema is of course simply one out of many recurring patterns we become familiar with amidst our embodied existences. Others mentioned by Johnson include, but are not restricted to, BALANCE, COMPULSION, BLOCKAGE, ATTRACTION, PATH, LINK, SCALE, CYCLE, CENTER-PERIPHERY (1987, p. 206), to name a few (see Clausner & Croft 1999; Johnson 2007; Lakoff 1987; Mandler & Cánovas 2014). Some of these will be explained and utilised throughout latter parts of the thesis. For now, a related point I want to make revolves around Johnson’s idea that our knowledge of various worldly things (i.e. objects, concepts, propositions, etc.) is, in most cases, “based on a compositional blending of two or more image schemas” (2007, p. 142). For instance, the proposition “I went into the convenience store” is meaningfully reliant on the CONTAINER schema (i.e. entering a boundaried space). Yet, it is also made up of concurrent metaphorical elaborations of PATH (i.e. moving from outside to inside) and COLLECTION (i.e. grouping disparate items together under the collective concept of the ‘store’), amongst other image schemas. Put simply, most of our everyday activities, thoughts, interactions, etc. are made up of imaginative overlays of multiple experiential structures learnt through and inseparable from our corporeal existences.

Due to our largely similar human anatomies, Johnson sees all image schemas as “commonly shared (if not universal) gestalts structures” (1987, p. 62) that most embodied persons are capable of implicitly grasping. However, the rich conscious meanings they inspire are not solely indebted to their latent structuring patterns alone. Instead, Johnson suggests that an individual’s “background knowledge, motivations, interests, values, and previous experiences” (1987, p. 62) also affect how these bodily logics are creatively flourished vis-à-vis unique biographical situations. For example, an ‘emotional’ adolescent and professional lawyer may possess different nuanced understandings of what a BALANCED argument entails – even if both persons share a similar fundamental awareness of this near-ubiquitous image schema. Yet, at the very same time, Johnson posits that “embodied patterns do not remain [entirely] private or peculiar to the person who experiences them … [since] our community helps us interpret and codify many of our felt patterns” (1987, p. 14). In other words, our milieus (i.e. including common languages, handed-down ideals, proliferated metaphors, sedimented beliefs, etc.) offer cultural meaning-templates that partly veer us to extend upon our innate learnings of image schemas in prevalent – and hence, communicable – ways. For instance, most persons – in being aware of COUNTERFORCE (Johnson 1987, p. 46) – are likely to share a generic conceptual understanding of what an ‘argument’ is (e.g. two individuals...
COUNTERING or going head-to-head against each other, etc.). This knowledge is partly informed through a person’s individual experiences (e.g. his / her own past arguments, etc.), but also concurrently depends on his / her exposures to social norms that imbue this schematically-based concept (e.g. being taught the word and its implications, etc.).

In sum, then. Johnson suggests that all elaborate forms of embodied meaning arise from what is ultimately an indivisible, non-dualistic blend of personal and public influences, including “bodily rhythms, orientations, moods, desires, interested responses, frustrated impulses, cultural attitudes, mythological influences, language structure, personal history, etc.” (1987, p. 14). To this degree, how we come to understand the world is not purely biologically determined via image schemas, neither is it fully a matter of abstract social constructions. Rather, abandoning this rigid Cartesian-derived dichotomy (see Scheper-Hughes & Lock 1987, p. 10), Johnson’s dynamic philosophy encourages us to regard all that is meaningful to us as phenomena that holistically emerge through the creative structuring capacities of our environmentally-embedded bodies.

3.2. Exploring ‘Being in Love’ as Embodied Meaning

Here, it warrants stating that Johnson’s work sits amidst ongoing scholarly debates on “just what it means to say that cognition is embodied” (Kiverstein 2012, p. 740) – to which there exists “very different notions of exactly what embodiment is and what kind of body is required for what type of embodied cognition” (Ziemke 2003, p. 1305). A few varying conceptions include ‘embodied intelligence’ (Brooks 1991), Csordasian embodiment (Csordas 1990), and ‘historical embodiment’ (Ziemke 2003, p. 1307), amongst other diverse multi-disciplinary treatments of the subject. I do not intend to elaborate on nor argue for or against any of these approaches, since such discussions fall outside the scope of this phenomenological study. However, I wish to make clear that Johnson’s distinct exposition of embodiment – which he himself associates with “biofunctional understanding” (Johnson 2015, n.p.) – is by no means exhaustive in its explanation of bodily processes of meaning-making, nor is it immune from fair critique (see Gunderson (1992), McMahon (2009), and Stjernfelt (2007) for examples of relevant assessments). Still, I propose the collective strength of Johnson’s core ideas and formulated lexicon (e.g. schematic reasoning, metaphorical elaborations, indivisible organism-environmental interactions, etc.) is contextually suited to meeting the contributive and illustrative aims of my research.
For starters, Johnson’s embodied philosophy is key to helping me redress the first major trend covered in my literature review. To reiterate, many constructionist accounts are heavily ideational, focused on analysing the words, languages, discourses, symbols, etc. that epistemically frame people’s so-called ‘mental’ experiences of love. However, these explorations tend to ignore the constitutive role our material bodies play in making sense of this phenomenon. In this regard, Johnson, whilst not directly addressing constructionism or love per se, articulates a closely related point to those posited by Burkitt (2003), Cromby & Nightingale (1999), and Lyon (1995) (as discussed):

The reduction of the body to the mere physical organism is just as misguided as the opposite error of claiming that the body is nothing but a cultural construction. They are both reductions; the first leaves out large parts of what makes meaning and mind possible, and the second leaves out many of the sources of, and constraints on, meaning and mind that come from the character of our corporeal rootedness in the biological-ecological processes of life. (2007, p. 278)

By contrast, utilising Johnson’s non-dualistic ontology gives me an exciting chance to explore ‘being in love’ in ways that progressively rediscover the body as an active genesis of human understanding. Of course, methodologically, I will still inevitably be examining my interviewees’ expressed words, concepts, propositions, etc. via transcribed responses (see Chapter 4). However, unlike most typical constructionist studies, my research is not restricted to traditional ‘discourse analysis’ (Jorgenson & Phillips 2002) insofar as I will not solely focus on ideational discoveries alone (see Chapter 6). Instead, my Johnson-inspired analytical agenda is two-fold. First, based on his principle of meaning-making continuity, I seek to identify possible image schemas that quietly provide coherent structuring order to interviewees’ elaborate experiences of ‘being in love’. For example, in Chapter 9, I orient their descriptions of feeling ‘drawn towards’ partners to the ATTRACTION schema that, in my opinion, subtly patterns their abilities to conceive such abstract meanings. Partaking in this form of schematic investigation allows me to go beyond purely constructionist concerns, better appreciating interviewees’ embodied romantic sensibilities as being “more than words and deeper than concepts” (Johnson 2007, p. 1).20 Second, Johnson’s notion on indivisible biographical / cultural extensions of image schemas encourages me to equally consider both a person’s unique moments of ‘being in love’ and the implicit meaning-templates

---

20 In addition, I am in a more comfortable epistemological position to explore the meaningfulness of interviewees’ multisensorial activities (e.g. kisses, hugs, etc.) that, to them, make up core aspects of ‘being in love’. This form of embodied analysis is seldom seen in most constructionist studies prone to bodily oversights.
that interlace with them. For example, in Chapter 8, I make efforts to home in on each interviewee’s novel memories of befriending their partners whilst also examining societal impressions of ‘friendship’ that may have steered them to subsume these relations as integral facets of ‘being in love’. This exploratory style compliments my aim to produce phenomenological insights that retain a shared focus on idiographic intimacies and wider environmental influences – an enriched agenda that partly amends macrosociological ‘top-down’ reductions (i.e. the third literature trend – to be discussed more).

In the next chapter, I move on to outline the main premise of IPA, and how my selected research methods / strategies – when infused with Johnson’s work – aid me in meeting this study’s inductive goals amidst a further recompensing of the present lacuna in the literature on love.
4. Methodology

“Love is only a word, until someone arrives to give it meaning.”
(Coelho 2013, p. 79)

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first offers a broad overview of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). I have also included additional resources for readers keen to learn more about this research approach beyond the confines of this thesis. The second section identifies how IPA is best suited to both meet my project’s aims and, with Johnson’s philosophy of embodiment, help to further offset the previously explained literature trends. Lastly, the third section unpacks my research design, delineating my rationale for choosing specific IPA methods and strategies (e.g. sampling frame, interviewee selection process, data collection / analysis, etc.). A few methodological limitations are briefly covered, with a more detailed discussion to be found in Chapter 13.

4.1. An Overview of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

First promoted by the likes of Smith (1996) and Smith, Flowers & Osborn (1997), IPA is a distinct qualitative research approach originally used in health psychology (Smith 1996) – but has since quickly expanded across many academic disciplines (Smith 2011). At its core, IPA is concerned with “the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 1). For Smith, Flowers & Larkin, such ‘life experiences’ refer to instances that carry a “larger significance in the person’s life” (2009, p. 2) to the extent they are perceived as parts of a broader, more impactful ‘unit’ of meaning. To illustrate what is meant, consider a person who feels a sudden surge of coldness when he / she steps into a chilly lake (see Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 1-2). On its own, this kind of immediate experiential immersion is usually fleeting, seldom calling for extensive personal reflection. However, things assume greater meaning when, for example, we realise this person is a professional swimmer, with this swim being seen by him / her as the first of many challenging steps towards a full recovery from major surgery. Thus, in
such a scenario, the icy water is not merely an isolated event, but is instead an important experience that relates to the wider arc of his existence (i.e. a ‘life experience’). It follows that an IPA researcher keen to better understand the swimmer’s views is likely to connect the latter’s past, present, and future swims as “parts [that] are separated in time but ‘linked with a common meaning’” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p/. 2). ‘Meaning’ in this case could perhaps pertain to the swimmer’s desires to reclaim his / her athletic career, his / her complex feelings towards physical injury, and so on. The interested IPA researcher would therefore commit to describing “in detail what the experience for this person is like, what sense this particular person is making of what is happening to them” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 3) as expressed by him / her.

Readers may wish to refer to Pietkiewicz & Smith (2015), Pringle et al. (2011), and Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009) for more in-depth looks at IPA’s deep phenomenological roots. However, in brief, the approach is heavily inspired by Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre, amongst other phenomenologists (see Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 11-39). To be clear, IPA does not fully align itself with any one philosopher. Instead, certain phenomenological thoughts are sidelined whilst others are adopted in an effort to put together a pragmatic strategy for investigating people’s life experiences. Some precursive influences on IPA that resonate with this study21 include, but are not limited to:

- Husserl’s pioneering agenda to examine “the content of consciousness, our lived experience[s]” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 16) with systematic depth and rigour. This is partly evocative of my key objective to conduct an in-depth exploration of interviewees’ experiences of ‘being in love’.

- Heidegger’s treatment of each individual as a ‘person-in-context’ whose meaningful experiences occur via being “‘thrown into’ a [pre-existing] world of objects, relationships, and language” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 18). This philosophical pulse echoes my own Johnson-inspired goal to regard interviewees’ loving moments as emerging from their inseparably embodied cultural-situatedness – in short, a ‘person-in-context’.

- Merleau-Ponty’s seminal belief that “the body shapes the fundamental character of our knowing about the world” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 19). This view compliments Johnson’s notions on corporeal meaning-making and image schemas – which I intend to apply.

21 Apart from very brief mentions of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, I do not directly utilise the works of these philosophers in my thesis. Readers may nonetheless regard aspects of their thinking as already infused within my predominant use of IPA – which in itself selectively coalesces their oeuvres.
Sartre’s suggestion that our interactions with others are always “embodied, interpersonal, affective, and moral” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 20). Such a perspective is akin to this study’s phenomenological focus on exploring the corporeal, relational, and intimate dimensions of interviewees’ loving moments.

Together with phenomenology, IPA is inspired by hermeneutics, paying homage to the works of Schleiermacher, Gadamer, and Heidegger (see Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 21-28). This school of thought invites IPA researchers to regard their qualitative findings not as ‘objective facts’ in the strictest sense, but rather, as inevitable acts of interpretation. These acts are most pronounced during ‘double hermeneutic’ moments when “participants are trying to make sense of their world [as] the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world” (Smith & Osborn 2007, p. 53). To this end, those who choose to use IPA as a method of experiential investigation are persuaded to “combine empathic hermeneutics with a questioning hermeneutics” (Smith & Osborn 2007, p. 53). This entails “trying to understand what it [i.e. an experience] is like, from the point of view of the participants” (Smith & Osborn 2007, p. 53) whilst critically ‘reading between the lines’ for presumptions (e.g. beliefs, ideals, etc.) interviewees may not be fully aware of and / or readily admit to. Of course, IPA also recognises that all researchers themselves possess their own personal fore-conceptions (prior experiences, values, preferences, etc.) that to some degree or another influence the research process, including how responses are hermeneutically interpreted (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 25). Despite this, the driving mission of IPA studies is for researchers to retain a persistent ‘open spirit’ towards the researched, allowing the latter to freely convey their experiences amidst dialogical relationships (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 29).

IPA is primarily idiographic, favouring detailed examinations of individuals’ life experiences over the positing of sweeping nomothetic judgments on large populations (Smith 2007, p. 56; Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 29). The approach thus treasures the value of analytical depth and nuanced personal accounts, rather than generic probabilities or spacious observations (Smith & Osborn 2007, p. 56). In this regard, IPA is steadfastly “committed to understanding how particular

---

22 Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009, p. 21) regard hermeneutics as a mostly separate school from phenomenology. Nonetheless, they see the two fields as merging in the works of selected hermeneutic phenomenologists such as Heidegger.

23 Concurrently, researchers’ interpretative acts can in themselves cause them to re-evaluate their own fore-conceptions that, cyclically, further evolves how they interpret things (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 25).


experiential phenomena (an event, process, or relationship) have been understood from the perspective of particular people, in a particular context” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 29) [emphasis added]. Yet, to be clear, IPA studies are still very much welcomed to explore phenomenological claims that relate to broader structural influences and cultural settings. However, such macro expositions should first begin by paying micro-analytical attention to a person’s life experiences as researchers “prescribe a different way of establishing those generalisations … [in a manner that] locates them in the particular, and hence develops them more cautiously” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 29).

4.2. Using IPA to Meet Research Aims and Redress Literature Trends

IPA is well-suited in helping me tackle my study’s sensitising goals. For starters, I do not intend to limit my phenomenological analysis of ‘being in love’ to singular moments or activities per se (e.g. a kiss, one conversation, etc.). Rather, as is the purpose of IPA, the aim is to more holistically examine interviewees’ feelings as a larger unit of meaning – that is, as an expansive life experience deemed by them to be of great personal importance. In addition, IPA’s emphasis on “exploring persons’ relatedness to, or involvement in, a particular event or process (phenomenon)” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 40) resonates with my own agenda to identify the common qualities of ‘being in love’. This commonality does not imply an Husserlean sense of transcendental ‘universal essences’ (Lopez & Willis 2004, p. 729) but, more simply, the prevalent and time-persisting experiential features shared amongst a specific group of persons who see themselves as ‘truly loving’ their partners. Moreover, IPA recognises human experiences to be indivisibly and relationally embodied (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 18-19). This is a core phenomenological position congruent with Johnson’s non-dualistic corporeal philosophy, and hence, further nourishes my motive to counteract the first trend covered in the literature review (i.e. ‘disappearing bodies’ amidst most constructionist studies on love).

IPA also assists in balancing out the second and third literature trends. To restate my previous point, I believe it is difficult – if not impossible – for me as a researcher to fully ‘bracket’ my intellectualist bias when exploring others’ experiences of ‘being in love’. However, this is where

24 Nonetheless, these activities are crucial aspects of interviewees’ ‘whole’ perceptions of ‘being in love’ – and thus will also be examined vis-à-vis their wider existential arcs.
IPA’s blend of hermeneutics and empathy comes in. The approach reaffirms my opinion that social scientific studies are implicitly coloured by scholars’ personal dispositions (i.e. favoured theories / methods, analytical interpretations, etc.) (see Smith & Osborn 2007, p. 53). Yet, unlike past studies on love that unreservedly propagate ‘ivory-towered’ definitions and / or authors’ pre-existing views and agendas, IPA inspires me to always give foremost heed to interviewees’ everyday perceptions of ‘being in love’, prioritising their experiences over imposing my own fore-conceived opinions on the phenomenon. Thus, whilst recognising my academic privileges, the overarching IPA-driven goal for me is to stay empathetically “‘open’ not ‘closed’ … exploratory not explanatory” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 47). In doing so, I seek to develop a multi-voiced understanding that amplifies – rather than marginalises – the lived experiences of persons who believe themselves to ‘truly be in love’ with their partners.25 IPA’s central concern with detailing human experience also empowers me to explore ‘being in love’ as a multifarious phenomenon worthy of attention on its own terms – not merely delimited to fit in with some presupposed scholastic project.26

In addition, IPA’s strong idiographic focus serves as a useful counterpoise to overly broad macrosociological claims on love that lack experiential nuance and / or qualitative substantiation. Here, I wish to once more make clear my own modest intention to pursue some wider conjectures – specifically, my Johnson-inspired explorations of possible cultural meaning-templates that might have partly influenced interviewees’ embodied moments of ‘being in love’. However, these tentative discussions – in accordance with IPA – will only proceed carefully from the ‘bottom-up’27 via an initial “sensitivity to context through close engagement with the idiographic and particular” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 180). In other words, any identified environmental

25 IPA has even influenced how I chose to phrase my main and sensitising research questions, placing weight on Other-oriented understanding (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 46-48).
26 Again, I recognise the decision to utilise, and subsequently illustrate, my theoretical / methodological position (i.e. Johnson’s philosophy of embodiment / IPA) is a presupposed agenda – a form of intellectualist bias. Regardless, the key point of emphasis is the highly inductive and reactional style in which my discoveries unfurl (see Section 4.2.) that stands in contrast to the ‘closed’ definitional proceedings of other works falling into the second literature trend.
27 By ‘bottom-up’, I am simply using a shorthand to refer to the methodological sequence of exploration – in this case, starting with a micro-analysis of idiographic accounts before working my way ‘up’ to considering broader cultural meaning-templates. However, in terms of meaning-making processes, Johnson’s philosophy of embodiment takes precedence insofar as I see interviewees’ experiences of ‘being in love’ as interweavingly imbued via biographical / schematic / environmental flows – not in a strictly hierarchical fashion (be it from the ‘bottom-up’ or reversed).
Factors are based on and intimately contextualised to interviewees’ lives, inferred from their actual biographical responses rather than ‘armchair theorisation’ alone.28

At this juncture, it warrants stating that Johnson receives little to no formal usage within the IPA literature. Yet, I see this as simply a case of his work being presently overlooked by researchers, not due to any inherent theoretical / methodological conflicts. In this regard, I opine that infusing his non-dualistic philosophy and key ideas into my IPA study will aid me in better illustrating how interviewees’ experiences of ‘being in love’ are embodied. More specifically, his compatible oeuvre equips me with an especially flexible vocabulary for systematically revealing the ways their lived meanings flourish via an organic unfolding of personal identities, recurring corporeal patterns, and handed-down styles of cultural thinking.

4.3. Research Design

I will now discuss the precise IPA methods and strategies used for this study and my rationale for selecting them.

4.3.1. Sampling Strategy and Frame

With IPA, interviewees are generally selected “on the basis that they can grant us access to a particular perspective on the phenomena under study” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 49). The authors thus advocate for a purposive homogenous sampling strategy specifically geared to finding persons “for whom the research question will be meaningful” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 49). In this case, my research interest lies with exploring lived experiences of ‘being in love’ among a group of young heterosexual Caucasian Australians living in Victoria, Australia. Call-for-participation ads with requirement and contact details were placed in four newspapers across various local regions. I then evaluated all interested respondents according to the following sampling frame:

---

28 Moreover, unlike many macrosociological studies on love, such broader observations are not to be taken as outright causal statements – merely exploratory and illustrative of indivisible processes of meaning-making (see Chapter 6).
He/she must be Australian, both in terms of official citizen status and personal identity (e.g. “I see myself as an Australian”). He/she should also identify as Caucasian and heterosexual, and has spent most of his/her life in Victoria.

Who counts as a ‘young adult’ is hypothetical and open to debate. In this case, I favoured respondents between the ages of 18 and 25, for various reasons.29

He/she must profess to have first-hand experiences of ‘being in love’. He/she should also be in an ongoing ‘truly’ loving partnership (as deemed by him/her) – if only to help me gather responses grounded in still-occurring relational contexts (rather than being overly nostalgic or anticipatory of past/future beloveds).30

To minimise the risk of drop-outs, he/she should express a high initial interest in committing to at least ten face-to-face interviews, conducted over a period of about two years.31

A crucial point needs to be made here. On one hand, I concur with Teo (2005, p. 171) in believing that the general Western concept of romantic love – and by extension, ‘being in love’ – is so widely proliferated that it cannot be merely isolated to a single country, region, or group (see also Lindholm 2006). Yet, at the very same time, the nuances of such broad feelings do seem to vary according to diverse socio-demographic factors, including cultural upbringing (e.g. Beall & Sternberg 1995; Dion, KK & Dion, KL 1996; Karandashev 2015; Levine et al. 1995), gender (e.g. Heiss 1991; Singh 2013; Yuste et al. 2014), age (e.g. McKenzie 2015; Meier & Allen 2009), race (e.g. Strully 2014; Troy, Lewis-Smith & Laurenceau 2006), sexuality (e.g. Steinbugler 2012; Umberson, Thomeer & Lodge 2015), and so on.

Giving weight to both these views, my decision to seek out young Australians based on a “number of obvious socio-demographic factors” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 50)32 is due to an initial

---

29 This range is inspired by an abundance of recent studies on romantic relationships focused on a similar age demographic (e.g. Manning et al. 2011, Rauer et al. 2013, Shulman & Connolly 2013). Often also referred to as ‘emerging adulthood’ (Arnett 2000), many scholars posit this life-stage to be an especially prime period “where one is free to invest in explorations related to romance and love” (Gala & Kapadia 2013, p. 406; e.g. Arnett 2004, Stephanou 2012, Young, Furman & Laursen 2011). Such consistent observations compelled me to purposively search for interviewees who fall within this group, based on my belief that they are most likely to offer rich descriptions of ‘being in love’ (although the phenomenon is of course not restricted to just these ages).

30 Thankfully, all my selected interviewees remained in their same respective romantic partnerships throughout the entire data collection phase (i.e. no ‘breakups’). This greatly helped me gather consistent experiential references from each person, making data analysis easier (e.g. I could infer relatively stable impressions of their unchanging partners over multiple interviews – without having to learn about any new love-interests ‘from scratch’, etc.).

31 The final number of conducted interviews and full interview schedule went beyond this original proposal (see Section 4.3.3. Data Collection).

32 A few readers may see some of the variables I have selected as slightly arbitrary – to which I would provisionally agree, within some broad contexts. For instance, I do not believe a young Australian’s general (i.e. non-nuanced) conceptions of ‘being in love’ will be too far-flung from Americans of a comparable group (see Teo 2005) – despite some possible cultural differences and obvious biographical variances. Yet, since my study does not aim to overhaul
personal preference and curiosity, owed to my own background as a researcher. However, I wish to make it clear that the chosen small-scale group is by no means ultimately more ‘deserving’ of qualitative investigation than others (see Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 49). On the contrary, readers should note this current study merely marks the starting point of what I hope will be a future series of cross-comparative IPA projects that aim to explore possible experiential similarities (i.e. generalities) / divergences (i.e. nuances) of people’s loving moments both within and across diverse socio-demographic groups (see Chapter 14). This indicates my long-term commitment to slowly paint a bigger phenomenological picture of ‘being in love’ that, in accordance to IPA’s proposed macro-from-micro strategy, remains intricately rooted in empathetic listening and idiographic details. I also want to add that my effort to define a ‘homogenous’ sampling frame does not equate to seeing interviewees as absolute identikits of each other. More specifically, the goal here is to explore the shared qualities that define their experiences of ‘being in love’ whilst also keeping a healthy respect for their unique individualities, life-situations, and romantic partnerships (see Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 50).

4.3.2. Sampling Size

There is at present very little consensus on the ‘correct’ number of interviewees to use in general phenomenological research. For example, Creswell (1998, p. 123) suggests recruiting between five to twenty-five interviewees with Morse (1994, p. 225) recommending at least six. Meanwhile, the methodological directives of IPA, I am willing to work within its established guidelines for now (e.g. restricting my sampling frame to certain factors, etc.), even as I recognise their partial (but by no means complete) superficiality. Reflecting the ‘double hermeneutics’ of all IPA research, this inquisitiveness stems from my own personal affinity with many of my chosen interviewee selection variables. I am a 36-year-old Singaporean who identifies himself as a heterosexual person with first-hand experiences of ‘being in love’. Whilst of a different nationality and age group, I believe my unique background as a professional musician who wrote popular ‘love songs’ for young adults infuses me with a pronounced sensitivity towards the romantic experiences of my selected demographic group. This biographical disclosure is intended to make readers partly aware of the ongoing researcher / researched dynamic, and my relation to the research questions.

Trying to carry out such an ambitious project within the time and space constraints of this thesis would have greatly undermined the idiographic depth I am striving for – and thus, has been kept as a future research prospect. The cross-disciplinary literature heavily stresses the influence of gender in shaping differing romantic experiences amongst heterosexual men and women (e.g. Heiss 1991; Hendrick, SS & Hendrick, C 1995, Yuste et al. 2014, etc.) – most notably, with respects to intimacy, emotional expressivity, and relationship satisfaction (Ubando 2016). In light of this, I have made the conscious decision to select a balanced number of male and female interviewees. By doing so, I aim to – as best as possible – transcend any potential gender variances to identify common qualities of ‘being in love’ relevant to all persons of this small-scale study. This methodological strategy by no means disavows the impact of gender identities on the phenomenon; instead, it merely reflects my goal to discover general experiential features that render it a collective (albeit individually appropriated) “medium of communication” (Luhmann 2010, p. 2).
Englander (2012, p. 20) stresses the importance of interview ‘depth’ over exact participant numbers whilst Kvale vaguely posits the need to “interview so many subject that you find out what you need to know” (1994, p. 165). The subfield of IPA studies is just as ambiguous, with Smith, Flowers & Larkin stating that “there is no right answer to the question of the sample size” (2008, p. 51). Regardless, they do go on to explain that:

[Sample size] partly depends on: the degree of commitment to the case study level of analysis and reporting; the richness of the individual cases; and the organization constraints one is operating under … [T]he primary concern of IPA is with a detailed account of individual experience. The issue is quality, not quantity, and given the complexity of most human phenomena, IPA studies usually benefit from a concentrated focus on a small number of cases. (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2008, p. 51)

With this agenda, Smith, Flowers & Larkin propose “between three and six participants can be a reasonable sample size for a student project using IPA” (2008, p. 51). They suggest this flexible range “should provide sufficient cases for the development of meaningful points of similarity and difference between participants … [without the researcher] being overwhelmed by the amount of data generated” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2008, p. 51). However, the authors admit to having greater difficulty in proposing an exact sample size range for PhD projects (such as this one) due to large research varieties (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2008, p. 52). They nonetheless posit that it is far more crucial for Doctorate students to focus on the “numbers of interviews [rather than participants]” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2008, p. 52) insofar as sufficient time is given to in-depth dialogue and analysis.

Corroborating all the above suggestions, I initially started my data collection with eight purposively selected interviewees based on my sampling frame.36 Yet, after three months, I found this relatively high number led to an overly busy interview schedule that, in effect, curbed my chances to delve further into each person’s unique ‘love story’. I thus decided to reduce my sample size to the four interviewees whom I personally found to be the most forthcoming in their descriptions of ‘being in love’. Matching IPA’s emphasis on quality over quantity, I was subsequently able to nurture much deeper individual relationships hallmarked by greater empathy.

36 I was initially contacted via email by twelve keen respondents. Four of them did not fully meet my purposive sampling criteria – to which the remaining eight were eventually narrowed down to four, based on my specified reasons.
and attention to experiential detail. This lower number also allowed me to commit more written space to every person, giving readers a richer sense of what his / her romantic partnership is like.

4.3.3. Data Collection

Smith, Flowers & Larkin suggest the best IPA data collection method involves “invit[ing] participants to offer a rich, detailed, first-person account of their experiences” (2009, p. 56). For this purpose, they recommend in-depth semi-structured interviews as the most suitable strategy since they “facilitate the elicitation of stories, thoughts and feelings about the target phenomenon” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 56) – in this case, ‘being in love’. These interviews allow persons to “speak freely and reflectively, and to develop their ideas and express their concerns at some length” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 56) with minimal interventions from researchers (see Flick 2006, p. 169; Morse & Field 1995, p. 58; Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 59). By letting interviewees shape the flow of conversation, researchers may over time “enter, as far as possible, the psychological and social world of the respondent” (Smith & Osborn 2007, p. 69) in ways that reveal the lived meanings of their experiences.

These widely discussed benefits (both within and outside of IPA discourses) inspired me to use semi-structured interviews as a main method of data collection for this study. In total, I carried out fifty-two one-on-one interviews over a span of three years (roughly twelve to fifteen interviews per person). Each in-person interview lasted an estimate of two to three hours. All human research ethics highlighted by the University of Melbourne (2017) were strictly adhered to with formal approval.

Of course, semi-structured interviews alone do not guarantee interviewees will be completely forthcoming or honest about their experiences. Some degree of rehearsed speech or impression management (Goffman 1959) is bound to happen, especially during initial meetings (see Dingwall 1997; Gilboa & Verfaelle 2010; Hycner 1985, p. 296; Kruger 1994). This is partly due to implicit researcher-researched power dynamics within most interview climates (see Funder 2005, p. 5-6; Gomm 2004, p. 176) but – in this context – also relates to what I believe to be socialised difficulties surrounding the disclosure of one’s ‘private’ intimate moments. Together, these issues have the potential to impinge upon my efforts to create ‘natural climates’ for open talks, leading to
disparities between what interviewees actually feel they are experiencing and what they choose to say (see Adler, PA & Alder, P 2001; Collins, Shattell & Thomas 2005; Hutchinson & Wilson 1992) – in effect, thwarting phenomenological observation (see Chapter 13 for more).

In anticipation of these challenges, I decided to adopt a few additional data collection strategies to reduce (as best as realistically possible) the effects of the above issues. For starters, I made active attempts to establish genuine rapport with each of my interviewees. There are of course some risks in doing this – for example, interviewees may become too consensual due to friendship, “creati[ng] … a situation where [he / she] … seeks to provide information that is thought to be expected or wanted by the researcher” (Ryan & Dundon 2008, p. 444). Nonetheless, in step with Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009, p. 64), I believe trying to foster mutual trust, familiarity, and respect with my interviewees affirms the idea that “the better the quality of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, the richer the quality of the data elicited” (Ryan & Dundon 2008, p. 443). Indeed, with this study, I found the more relaxed I was during interviews, the more interviewees became comfortable with earnestly sharing their self-reflections on ‘being in love’ with partners. This in turn greatly improved my opportunities to gather experiential insights that did not seem overly affected by impression management or self-consciousness.37

To facilitate easy conversations, I also avoided asking my research questions in a direct manner, since this straightforward approach is usually inefficient in gathering biographically-enriched responses (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2008, p. 58-61). Instead, I chose to “come at the research question ‘sideways’” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2008, p. 58). This meant that I had to first pay attention to what interviewees were saying, giving them room to shape the course of discussions whilst I subtly guided their dialogues to key areas of experiential interest. For instance, rather than explicitly asking “What is ‘being in love’?”, I would casually inquire about their day-to-day experiences with partners, often orienting my queries to concrete incidences (see Weiss 1995, p. 71). This effectively led to fluid talks filled with their rich personal narratives, memories, and discoveries of their loving feelings. These open-ended topics were characterised by revealing

---

37 I suggest there will always be some degree of these elements in most everyday conversations. Regardless, my task as an IPA researcher is to try my best to reduce their frequency through the earning of friendly relations with interviewees.
responses that concerned my main research aims – mostly free from the stifling air of formality. Some ‘sideways’ questions I asked included, but are far from limited to:

- What do you like most about your partner? Why?
- Has he / she influenced your life in any meaningful way? How?
- Tell me about the time you first started having loving feelings towards him / her. Why did they come about?
- How do you think he / she sees you, as a person? Is this important to ‘being in love’?\(^{38}\)

As an additional means of building trust and reducing power imbalances, I made it a point to conduct all interviews in places selected by and familiar to interviewees. This included their homes, favourite leisure areas, cafés, and so on. The driving belief here is that “participants who are given a choice about where they will be interviewed may feel more empowered in their interaction with the researcher” (Elwood & Martin 2000, p. 656). Indeed, this arrangement seemed to greatly help my interviewees feel more at ease amidst settings they were already acquainted with. On occasion, I even asked them to pick interview locations that held special meaning to their current romantic relationships – for example, a park that they and their partners often visit, a diner they frequent together, etc. Such memorable areas appeared to warm interviewees up to recalling and disclosing their most unforgettable loving moments. I also found that being physically present in these spaces gave me material contexts to their verbal details (Elwood & Martin 2000, p. 652), further enriching my interpretations of their embodied experiences.

4.3.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis in IPA stresses flexibility and an iterative style of investigation (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 79). Although there is no single ‘right’ method, a few procedures are loosely recommended, yet remain open to innovation (see Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 79-107). The following inductive (i.e. non-linear) steps were adapted to suit this specific study:

- I carried out an intimate line-by-line analysis of interviewees’ transcribed responses (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 79). To maintain close idiographic context, all major experiential claims made by each person were set against my broader, evolving impressions of his / her conveyed life (i.e. described ‘parts’ of ‘being in love’ related to ‘whole’ biographical situations). For instance, one interviewee’s thoughts on ‘fated...

\(^{38}\) Such loose questions were of course phrased differently and usually more ‘naturally’ from conversation to conversation.
love’ was paired to his long-standing Christian belief in ‘God’s plans’ for him. In this sense, single conversations were treated as pieces of a wider identity spectrum.

- I concurrently took note of emerging experiential ‘themes’ both within and across interviewees’ accounts (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 91). For instance, every person consistently expressed his / her need to feel ‘truly himself / herself’ when interacting with his / her partner. This multi-interview trend was thus interpreted as a common theme of ‘self-authenticity’, in itself composed of various defining aspects (e.g. overarching sense of selfhood, epistemic valuations of ‘truth’ or ‘realness’, etc.). Examples of other themes include interviewees’ references to being ‘grouped’ with partners as ‘we-unions’, their habits of ‘sexual subjectification’, and so on. It is important for me to reiterate here that my inductive analysis was mostly focused on identifying general experiential themes that appear to endure throughout the entire research process (i.e. persistent understandings of what counts as ‘altruism’, etc.). As such, certain aspects of ‘being in love’ that seem more subject to nuanced biographical changes (e.g. interviewees’ shifting attitudes towards their desired amounts of physical intimacy, etc.) have not been extensively explored at this juncture (see Chapter 13.3 for future research directions).

- As themes formed, I began to apply analytical ‘abstraction’. This entails “identifying patterns between emergent themes and developing a sense of what can be called a ‘super-ordinate’ theme” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 96). These larger thematic clusters represent what I consider to be the most prevalent and defining experiential qualities of ‘being in love’ shared amongst all interviewees (individual divergences aside). For instance, I clustered my smaller themes of ‘commonality’ (i.e. interviewees’ wishes to share ‘common ground’ with partners) and ‘grouping’ (i.e. the forming of ‘we-unions’) into the super-ordinate theme of ‘friendship’. This brings together what I feel to be two meaningfully related themes (and the various aspects that shape them) under a unified master heading (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 79). Each super-ordinate theme has been assigned its own thesis chapter.

- My study seeks to illustrate the embodied nature of ‘being in love’. Analytically, this involves implementing Johnson’s idea of image schemas to most (super-ordinate) themes. For instance, interviewees often spoke of their needs to have ‘reciprocal’ relations with partners. This in turn led to explorations into how their implicit awareness of BALANCE enables such bodily-dependent meanings in the first place. The same Johnson-inspired analysis was carried out for all notable experiential findings.

- Further aligned with Johnson, certain (super-ordinate) themes were examined in tandem with possible cultural meaning-template influences. For instance, interviewees’ desires to befriend their partners compelled me to broadly investigate ‘friendship’ as a handed-down societal concept that may have subtly inspired their biographical grasps of ‘being in love’. Again, such ‘bottom-up’ discussions (in reaction to interviewees’ responses) are exploratory at best and, contra to many macrosociological theories, are not to be taken as causal or nomothetic facts – merely a method of illustrating holistic meaning-making processes.

39 In addition, I explored nuanced areas of divergence amongst interviewees to strike an analytical balance of “commonality with individuality” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 107). For instance, all of them stressed the importance of being physically attracted to their partners. However, I also noted how each person varies in the level of importance placed on this experiential theme.
I also held face-to-face cross-validity checks in an effort to reduce intellectualist bias on my part. Towards the end of the data collection phase, each interviewee was given written drafts of my major experiential observations. He/she was then free to decide if “findings are valid for them” (Hycner 1985, p. 297). Any descriptions that did not ‘ring true’ to his/her own experiences and/or were missing certain meanings were then revised to include his/her fresh feedback (see Colaizzi 1978, p. 58-62). This inclusive process was repeated until each interviewee agreed on the expressive accuracy of all (super-ordinate) themes vis-à-vis his/her own personal account – thus flourishing a multi-voiced perspective.40

Please refer to Chapter 6 for further details on best approaches to reading my key findings.

In its entirety, the above analytical strategy “reflect[s] not only the participant’s original words and thoughts but also the analyst’s interpretation” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 92). For this study, such hermeneutic acts required me to reflexively privilege some interview responses41 over others in an effort to reduce the copious amount of collected data into “concise and pithy statement[s] of what was important” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 92). These contractions do admittedly lead to a slight, albeit unavoidable, loss in experiential detail within each interviewee’s account. In addition, even with cross-validity checks, my intellectualist bias can never be fully extricated from the analytical process insofar as my own fore-conceptions are bound to affect how each (super-ordinate) theme is grouped, titled, emphasised, and linked to others. That said, this IPA project on ‘being in love’ remains firmly directed towards empathetically understanding, as closely as possible, “[the] participant’s [embodied] point of view, [with] a psychological focus on personal meaning-making” (Smith, Flowers & Parkin 2009, p. 79).

4.3.5. Writing the Thesis

Like most IPA research phases, there is no hard-and-fast rule on how to write or sequence the final thesis. However, Smith, Flowers, and Larkin highlight the importance of presenting key findings in a way that stays “comprehensible, systematic, and persuasive to [the] reader who is coming to your study for the first time” (2009, p. 109). They also suggest the use of ‘summary devices’

---

40 Schematic and cultural meaning-template explorations were not included in these cross-validity checks, since such types of ‘meaning-making’ findings were not of immediate experiential concern to them.

41 This includes both interviewees’ actual verbal descriptions and less straightforward allusions (e.g. body language, paralinguistic cues, etc.).
(usually of specific super-ordinate themes) that should “help the reader to get a broad sense of the whole, before getting into the detail” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 109). Based off these guidelines, I have organised my key experiential findings as such:

- Each following analysis chapter starts with a few very brief phenomenological observations coupled with concise interview extracts. These serve as contextual lead-ins that inform readers of the main experiential features that define the super-ordinate theme (i.e. shared quality of ‘being in love’) to be further unpacked.

- I go on to detail the most salient themes or ‘parts’ that make up the ‘whole’ of a particular super-ordinate theme. Interview quotes are used to “present evidence from each participant to support each theme (case within theme)” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 109).

- Subsequently, I explore possible image schemas that underlie and give coherent structure to such embodied experiences / meanings. Interviewees’ transcribed responses are again used as evidence of their implicit bodily reasonings.

- I then consider potential cultural meaning-templates (i.e. concepts, beliefs, etc.) that may have quietly flourished interviewees’ biographical perceptions of (super-ordinate) themes. External references give course to these discussions.

Unabridged phenomenological writing invites writers to embrace a free-flowing literary style as a means of capturing human experience in all its “concrete, mooded, sensed, imaginative, and embodied nature” (Finlay 2009, p. 14; see van Manen 2016). At the same time, this thesis still needs to meet the more formal demands of institutionalised academic work, including applying consistent logic, presenting a coherent report structure, and other standard expectations (see Dunleavy 2003). In response, I have tried to strike an ideal balance between the two contrasting styles, opting for fluid experiential descriptions in some appropriate instances and aiming to be stringent for others.
5. Vignettes

“The heart is a living museum. In each of its galleries, no matter how narrow or dimly lit, preserved forever like wondrous diatoms, are our memories of loving and being loved.”

(Ackerman 1994, p. 337)

The following vignettes are an introductory glimpse into the backgrounds and ‘love lives’ of Dan, Fiona, Ben, and Rachel – the four young Australians I have selected for my IPA study. These short biographies provide an idiographic, albeit very brief, look at each person’s contextual feelings of ‘being in love’ with his / her current partner. In reflexively rearranging and condensing conversational responses (both here and elsewhere), I have done so with the hope of capturing their prevalent meanings whilst also giving readers the interpreted essence of interviewees’ extensive, and at times haphazard, descriptions (see Ballis 1999, p. 41). Key points of experiential interest will be more fully explored in the proceeding chapters, along with other nuanced observations not mentioned here.

5.1. Dan

Twenty-four-year-old Dan grew up on the outskirts of Melbourne City in the small suburb of Oaklands Junction. As an “ordinary … neighbourhood kid”, he spent much of his early youth doing “the usual things boys do … [like] playing video games, hanging out … skipping school … all of that”. He claims to have “never wanted to … standout too much”, choosing instead to “keep my head low … spend time with my pals … [and] be as normal as possible”.

However, amidst this self-intended normalcy, Dan sheds light on his exceptionally strong Christian upbringing, which he claims still influences his identity today:

---

42 In accordance to the standard ethics of human research, I have replaced interviewees’ names with pseudonyms, also changing their jobs, residential areas, and various other identifiable information in the interest of maintaining their privacies and confidentialities.
My dad’s the local pastor, he still is … Honestly, I think growing up … I always had a full-on Christian experience … I think, yeah – there’s times I heard more of it [i.e. Christianity] than most of my friends … My dad’d always teach me about God and the Bible … I always enjoyed it … It wasn’t a drag to me … I’m still a strong Christian now … My faith still gives me perspective … [in] how I act … [and] the kind of man I want to be … even today. (Dan)

Now an Italian café manager living in Melbourne City Centre, Dan’s religion continues to shape his personal views on romantic love. He specifically sees ‘being in love’ as “a soulful gift from God … not some chance thing”:

Maybe it’s just me, I dunno … [but] I think about it … [and] it honestly makes sense to me … Way I see it, when I love someone … it’s really God’s doing … God wants me to meet this special someone … [and] learn something … Honestly, I don’t think it’s luck … it’s not coincidence … It’s just fate. (Dan)

Much of our conversations are spent discussing his fiancée, Jane, whom he has known for about seven years, and has been engaged to for two. He fondly recalls the first time they met, conveying how they “naturally went from friends … [to] best friends … falling in love … [and] staying in love”:

I first met her at Church camp … a long time back … We kept in touch … [and] I think, honestly … we just grew from there … I don’t think we had … one big epic moment where I’m thinking, “Okay, we’re in love” … I don’t think it was that straightforward like that … I think – we’re more organic … going with the flow … seeing where things took us … Now, we’re still going strong. (Dan)

A big part of Jane’s lasting appeal lies with her shared love for “doing all the mundane … everyday stuff together”:

I enjoy normalcy … Jane, too … We love relaxing at home … grabbing dinner together, nothing fancy … We walk the dog together … nothing special … I honestly think, yeah – we’re just a normal couple doing normal things … That’s totally fine by me … I think we both enjoy … our lives together that way. (Dan)

Whilst not immune to the occasional “couple’s squabbles”, Dan unwaveringly treasures Jane as “someone God sent to me … [to] teach me to love myself better”:

I think, end of the day – being in love with Jane … [has] made me a much better man … She lets me know I’m good enough … as just being myself … being who I am … I feel secure … [knowing] she accepts me … I don’t have to pretend … [and] I think – that’s not something I take for granted … She means a lot to me.

Dan hopes to marry Jane within the next five years, with plans to start a family soon after.
5.2. Ben

Ben, twenty-three, proudly calls himself a “loud-mouthed bogan [i.e. derogatory slang for ‘unrefined person’]” who “ain’t afraid to say shit like it is”. He attributes his bluntness to “years of hearin’ my folks … chewin’ each other out … [and] I got used to it”. Yet, rather than carrying a negative impact, Ben says his exposure to constant family fights has taught him the many benefits of “speakin’ my mind … [and] keepin’ it real”:

Mate, there’s two kinds of folks in this world … sooks [i.e. slang for ‘crybaby’] and people sayin’ things, as is … I’m sayin’ – we got enough sooks in this world … [so] I ain’t gonna waste time bein’ one … Folks’ll hate me and say all sorts of shit … [but] there ain’t no point bowin’ my head, know what I mean? … Most days, folks know … if I’m sayin’ something, I’m honest. (Ben)

Likening himself to a vagabond, Ben spends much of his time doing odds-and-ends jobs, mostly to avoid “stickin’ myself … [to] the fucking grinder”:

I’m the kinda bloke – if I’m ain’t likin’ what I’m doin’, I get bored, I get restless … [and] I go do somethin’ else … No point livin’ like a prisoner … Yeah, I ain’t rich – so what, know what I mean? … I pay my bills, I ain’t starvin’ … That’s good enough for me, mate. (Ben)

Speaking about romantic love, Ben’s describes how much of his late teens and early twenties has been spent rejecting “the whole … Disney fairy-tale love shtick”:

Mate, there’s always folks everywhere … buyin’ into the whole ‘happily ever after’ bullshit … [but] I’m goin’ – love ain’t that pretty, folks … I ain’t sayin’ there’s no such thing as love … I’m just sayin’ it ain’t always comin’ with a pretty bow … There’s fightin’, there’s arguments … not all roses and love songs. (Ben)

Yet, despite his self-acknowledged cynicism, Ben is steadfast in declaring his ‘true love’ for Sarah – his long-term girlfriend whom he has known for close to three years. First meeting at a nightclub, he entered into an intimate relationship with her a few weeks after. Adopting a noticeably gentler tone, Ben describes their love as “somethin’ still fresh … [and] real to me”:

Mate, I’ve had lotsa … short-term girls before … [but] Sarah – she’s different … She’s my first long-timer … Ain’t somethin’ I tried before … [but] I’m all in with this girl … We’re wildfire … [and] we ain’t fizzlin’ out yet. (Ben)
Ben nonetheless confesses that ‘being in love’ is “not always peachy” – especially when “we’re speakin’ rough … [and] shit hits the fan”:

We’re two stubborn assholes … [so] folks ain’t too surprised … [when] we’re blowin’ up … She says things one way, I’m talkin’ the other way … [and] we both go off … Not every day, mate … [but] it happens, sometimes.

Regardless, Ben says no amount of “petty bitchin’ and whinin’” has steered him away from staying ‘truly in love’ with Sarah – a commitment that inspires his wishes to “spend my miserable life with her”

I hate commitments … [but] she’s different, mate … We’re a good fit … I ain’t never been keen like this before I met her … I’m wantin’ to go all the way with her … settle down, start a life. (Ben)

The couple currently lives in a rented house at Footscray, with the goal to move to Sydney next year.

5.3. Fiona

Twenty-three-year-old Fiona is a professional YouTuber who specialises in beauty product reviews and tips. She describes herself as a friendly and easy-going person who “kinda, like, get[s] along with most everyone”:

I reckon, like, ya know – I’m good at listening to people talk … [so] people think I’m easy to be around … I’m not, like, super popular or anything … I reckon I’m just good at blending in … I don’t offend anyone. (Fiona)

Readily embracing “the fun things in life”, Fiona often cites her long-time friend, Fran, as a role-model who has motivated her to “live in the moment … [and] fully experience things”:

I reckon, like – I’ve known Fran … since we were teens! … I was quite fearful of trouble back then … [but] Fran showed me – like, ya know, it’s cool to just go for things… She’d go out and … do all these crazy and amazing things and I’m, like – “Wow, I want to be like that!” … Now I reckon … I’m all about chasing big experiences … Mountain climbing, travelling the world, stuff like that … Everything they say you gotta try once … I’ll try them! (Fiona)

Fiona’s zest for life filters into her experiences of ‘being in love’ with Jack, her boyfriend of four years. Sharing an apartment in St. Kilda, she discusses how their intimate relationship has been “a huge light for me”, mostly due to her willingness to “open my heart to him”: 
I admit, I was guarded [with him] at first … [but] he’s shown me, like – it’s okay to let go of … these walls I put up … I reckon, like, I only started to fully love him … [when] I learnt to let go … [and] just be myself … I reckon – it was a big deal to me at first … Now I’m so used to it, ya know? (Fiona)

This freedom to be self-authentic is especially important to Fiona given the pressure she feels at “keep[ing] up appearances … to my YouTube audience … [and] other people”:

With YouTube and stuff like that – it’s like, I gotta be cheery … [and] look pretty and stuff … People expect that, ya know? … I’ve to show this one side of me … [but] I’m lucky I’ve got Jack … I know, like – I reckon I can be real with him … whether I’m happy, sad, crazy … I can be who I am with him … [and] that’s so important. (Fiona)

Fiona stresses she is by no means “a blindly romantic person”. However, she admits to occasionally indulging in the “sweet parts of love”, including her devotions to “make Jack’s life better”:

The big thing for me – I feel good knowing I do, like, these little things for Jack … I look out for him … look out for his interests, ya know? … I love seeing his life get better … and happier … I reckon, that’s why I love him … I want to support him … do my best for him … be there for him.

Fiona and Jack have aims to travel the world together, with the desire to get engaged sometime within the next five years.

5.4. Rachel

Rachel sees herself as a life-long introvert. An only child growing up in Frankston, she talks about often playing on her own, too shy to interact with other kids. Now twenty-three, she remains “really quiet … reserved … [and] on the fringes”:

I really feel, um – I’m still very shy, I guess? … I’m not someone … who speaks up at meetings … Big gatherings make me anxious … Really extroverted people annoy me … I feel, um – I’d say, I always need my ‘me’ time … I need my space. (Rachel)

However, Rachel points out that her quietness does not mean a lack of energy. On the contrary, she regularly finds herself filled with an “overflowing urge … to be creative … [and] express myself”. This need for expression aligns well with her work as a professional artist – a job she considers to be “one of the … most fulfilling parts of my life”:
I really, really love art – I’ve always loved art … I feel so alive when I paint … I love letting my thoughts … [and] my feelings take over … It’s, um – I’d say, it’s very cathartic for me? … I feel release … My art’s an expression of my soul. (Rachel)

Like art, Rachel’s experiences of ‘being in love’ with her partner, Steve, are just as “expressive … [and] intimate”. A couple for close to five years, she cites their “real friendship … and open communication” as a prime reason for their enduring romantic bond:

From the start, um – I’d say, since we were only friends up till now … I feel we’ve never really struggled with talking openly … [and] honestly with each other … I guess, um – for us two … even when we hit a rough patch … we find a way to iron it out … I feel us two being friends … [has] really kept our love strong. (Rachel)

Rachel praises Steve’s ability to “bring out the best in me” which, in turn, inspires her to “do the same [for him]”:

Steve’s very encouraging … He’s great at coaxing me out of my shell … It’s, um – I feel he’s so patient with me … I really try to also motivate him … challenge him to be more creative … We have a really healthy, really encouraging relationship. (Rachel)

Even more so, Rachel values her love for Steve as a deeply life-changing experience that taught her how to “care for someone … besides only myself”:

Our society conditions us … to be so self-absorbed … I feel, um – I can be pretty self-absorbed at times, too … [but] I feel, um – in some sense, loving Steve’s really opened my world up … [to] learning how to truly care for him … as much as I care about myself … I really think that’s a recipe of love … [and] it’s very liberating, actually. (Rachel)

Presently living together in Dandenong, both Rachel and Steve aim to migrate to Milan within the next three years.
PART B

6. Notes on Key Findings
7. Self-Growth
8. Friendship
9. Attraction
10. Altruism
11. Reciprocity
12. Unideal Moments of ‘Being in Love’
6. Notes on Key Findings

“...phenomenological themes are more like knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus experienced as meaningful wholes.”

(van Manen 1984, p. 59)

I will first provide a quick overview of how my key findings will be structured. This brief introduction also clarifies a few phenomenological points that – true to IPA’s hermeneutic emphasis – will help readers ‘interpret my interpretations of interviewees' interpretations of their experiences of 'being in love’’. Footnotes offer greater detail.

Inferred from my cross-referencing of accounts, the first five findings chapters are respectively devoted to examining interviewees’ most prevalent shared qualities (super-ordinate themes) that, when experienced by each person concurrently\textsuperscript{43}, individually form his / her ‘ideal’ moments of 'being in love' with his / her partner. These qualities are \textit{self-growth, friendship, attraction, altruism, and reciprocity}\textsuperscript{44}. By labelling these qualities’ construing moments as ‘ideal’, I am simply suggesting in shorthand that they contribute to what interviewees consider to be their \textit{optimal} loving conditions (i.e. the times they felt \textit{most favourably ‘in love’}). Such considerations stem from past recollections, future anticipations, and / or more immediately occurring events with beloveds – all meaningfully elaborative of each other (to be further explained below).

Of course, none of the above five qualities are exclusive to 'being in love'. For instance, interviewees see 'friendship' as not solely a key aspect of ‘being in love’, but also a crucial

\textsuperscript{43} To be clear, the following five qualities need \textit{not} be felt by interviewees at once, in the very same instance. Instead, they may be experienced across a flexible time frame that each person individually deems to be of a reasonable range to him / her (e.g. a week, month, etc.) – but not too long that these qualities start to seem too spaced out from one another. For instance, an interviewee might perceive ‘self-growth’ with a partner during a specific moment – with ‘friendship’, ‘attraction’, ‘altruism’, and ‘reciprocity’ spread out / overlaying across other encounters. Yet, despite this temporal spacing, he / she may still see himself / herself as ‘ideally’ in love, insofar as he / she feels ‘not too much’ time has passed between instances of each quality.

\textsuperscript{44} Interviewees did not always use these exact labels (e.g. not all of them explicitly mentioned the term ‘self-growth’ \textit{per se}, etc.). Thus, in naming the five shared qualities as such, an inevitable degree of analytical inference was carried out, based on what I interpreted to be their allusions to certain prevalent experiential themes.
component to some of their platonic and / or familial relationships. To this end, Averill's explanation is especially pertinent:

> The components that make up a complex phenomenon are seldom unique to, or found only in connection with, that phenomenon. To take a crude analogy, oxygen is not peculiar to water (H2O), but water would not be what it is without oxygen. Similarly, romantic love may be compounded of many ingredients, few, if any, of which are unique to love. Yet, if some of these ingredients undergo change, then the properties of the whole may also change – not in some superficial sense, but fundamentally so. (1985, p. 97)

In light of this, each labelled quality can be recognised as a distinct phenomenon in its own right, as well as a potential ingredient of other styles of lived experience. Nonetheless, within our current context, all of them will only be analysed as formative parts of interviewees’ quintessential instances of ‘being in love’ – without which any entailing experiences / meanings would not be quite the same.

In a subsequent chapter, I move on to explore how interviewees’ felt lack or decline of any one or more of the five qualities can, under certain conditions, engender their ‘unideal’ feelings of ‘being in love’. I use the word ‘unideal’ here to refer to instances where each person may still see himself / herself as loving his / her partner – but actively seeks to rectify (to a conditional extent) a perceived impoverished condition of his / her partnership. However, very importantly, I discuss how interviewees are mostly inclined to treat both their ‘ideal’ and ‘unideal’ conditions of ‘being in love’ as part and parcel of ‘really’ or authentically loving their partners. That is to say, for them, ‘truly being in love’ entails having to respectively enjoy and endure good and challenging times with their beloveds, together. The following diagram offers an effective, albeit crude, illustration of this ongoing meaning-making process.

45 Like ‘idea’ moments of ‘being in love’, these ‘unideal’ conditions were expressed by interviewees as past recollections / future anticipations / reflections on more immediately occurring events – articulated at various points throughout the entire interview schedule.
Figure 2: Each interviewee’s discernment of ‘truly being in love’ is made up of both his / her ‘ideal’ and ‘unideal’ experiences of the phenomenon.

The following phenomenological points apply to all my findings, aiding readers in how to interpret them. For starters, I suggest any experiential descriptions I provide (on ‘being in love’ and its constituting qualities) should be taken as by-products of interviewees’ ‘self-internalised hermeneutic circles’ (see Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 27-29). I adapt this term to refer to their imaginative, continuous, and largely subconscious use of ‘part / whole’ processes of meaning-making. For instance, interviewees’ ‘attractions’ towards partners are perceived as ‘parts’ of their ‘whole’ perceptions of ‘being in love’. Yet, at the very same time, the ‘wholeness’ of their loving feelings also apprises them of what it means to be ‘attracted’ to beloveds (e.g. ‘being in love’ changes how they think about their nuanced allurements, etc.). In this sense, meaning-making processes between shared qualities and the phenomenon they construe are never strictly unilateral or sequential. Instead, I contend it is best to treat the diversity of interviewees’ conceived experiences as always mutually informative and elaborative of each other.

I propose every experience expressed by interviewees is meaningful “insofar as it stands against, and is related to, a background stretching from the past into the future” (Johnson 1987, p. 117). In other words, phenomenologically speaking, no conversed aspect of ‘being in love’ is ever imbued entirely ‘in the present’[^46] – but is instead always recollective and / or anticipatory in nature, imaginatively (and cyclically) pointing “beyond itself to prior event structures in experience or toward possible future structures” (Johnson 1987, p. 117). For instance, interviewees often describe their past ‘reciprocal’ relations with partners. In turn, these memories seem to influence

[^46]: ‘Present’ here is contextually related to the timings of each interviewee’s conversational responses.
their more current valuations of this quality, which thus stirs their future expectations of ‘reciprocity’ – ongoingly affecting the meanings they infer from past / present moments, etc. To this degree, readers can regard all findings as – in a non-literal sense – ‘temporally transcending’ experiential outcomes. Amidst this lived dynamism, it is also useful not to interpret interviewees’ experiences as falling into a closed either / or binary of ‘reality vs. fantasy (imagination)’ per se; rather, it is more insightful to “learn that reality is intertwined with rather than opposed to the imaginary” (Burke 2017, p. 54) – to which the phenomenon of ‘being in love’ is inevitably perceived “only and always through its imaginary dimension” (Burke 2017, p. 54).

There are points throughout this thesis where I inevitably rely on everyday experiential labels – sans greater elaboration. For example, in Chapter 8, I cover how interviewees’ romantic friendships with partners may lead to feelings of closeness that instil ‘trust’, ‘compassion’, and ‘joy’. Technically, each of these individual phenomena can be descriptively expanded on to further unravel their vernacular assumptions. However, as explained by Psathas:

… the [social scientist’s] effort to provide a full replication of such assumptions proves to be a task impossible of completion because as meanings are revealed, the assumptions being made in the analysis must also be explicated, and thus further explication, involving additional assumptions, would also need to be explicated, and so on, ad infinitum … [However] the original purpose that motivated his [/her] analysis does not require that every assumption be explicaded … [The] purpose at hand is sufficient to define the range and extent of that analysis, until proven otherwise by new findings, interpretations, and so on, and the accomplishment of understanding is an endless task whose end must nevertheless be provisionally accepted. (Psathas 1973, p. 11)

In this respect, I admit to giving a greater interpretative priority to some of interviewees’ expressed experiences over others. However, this does not imply that those I have left without detailed illumination are any less worthy of analytical attention. Rather, due to pragmatic constraints, both readers and I must accept “the impossibility of full explication” (Psathas 1973, p. 11), to which certain nuanced aspects of ‘being in love’ must for now stay as assumed “provisional truths, contingent upon ways of knowing and modes of understanding which themselves may later be overturned and changed” (Psathas 1973, p. 11).

On a related note, even with cross-validity checks, my findings (including how they are structured, categorised, linked, described, etc.) represent merely one out of myriad possible ways to interpret

47 As stated before, this style of intellectual bias is dissimilar to those found in studies mentioned in the Literature Review – to the extent I have striven to stay open to interviewees’ multifaceted descriptions via inductive observation.
interviewees’ responses. Thus, akin to most IPA studies, the experiential analysis I offer should be taken as exploratory and evocative, never definitive. Moreover, all preceding sections focused on experiential, schematic, and cultural considerations are assuredly non-exhaustive, since it is impossible to capture every conceivable facet of these complex (and ultimately, indivisible) dimensions. Building on my previous point, I also had to simplify or even curtail some observed aspects of ‘being in love’ in an effort to prioritise interviewees’ most salient views. This truncation was out of necessity – although I have tried my very best to create a rich phenomenological ‘snapshot’ empathetically oriented to interviewees’ ‘love lives’, whilst also hinting at the fluid bodily-environmental meaning-making processes that underlie and enliven them.

I also wish to clarify my approach to schematic investigations. Specifically, in certain proceeding sections, I attempt to demonstrate how image schemas quietly enable and constrain diverse aspects of interviewees’ loving instances. Methodologically, this involves mapping some of their descriptions to underlying embodied logics that aid in their meaningful constitution. For instance, interviewees regularly use words such as ‘within’, ‘inside’, etc. when expressing their ‘internal’ self-experiences. In Section 7.2, these words are highlighted as indicators of their unconscious metaphorical dependencies on basic CONTAINER logics (i.e. in / out / boundaries). Now, on the surface, this analytical method may seem to mirror strands of discourse analysis often used in social constructionist research (see Burr 2003, p. 149). However, unlike many constructionists, my intention does not lie with showing how “discourses produce subjectivity” (Burr 2003, p. 150). Instead, I simply seek to show how many of interviewees’ loved-related propositions, conceptions, etc. are implicitly indebted to schematic reasoning – without which they (and we) would be incapable of grasping such references. To this end, the elucidations I present are not ‘discourse-centric’, but instead, reflect my Johnson-inspired efforts to reveal the subtending role that bodily orientations play in imbuing interviewees’ moments of ‘being in love’.

Lastly, expanding on an earlier point, the many cultural meaning-templates I consider throughout this thesis emerge in inductive response to interviewees’ accounts of their romantic intimacies. For

---

48 For instance, I identify five shared qualities of ‘being in love’ – although other IPA researchers might vary in their thematic categorisations. This resonates with van Manen’s assertion that “phenomenological description is always one interpretation, and no single interpretation of human experience will ever exhaust the possibility of yet another complimentary, or even potentially richer, description” (1984, p. 40).

49 However, I stress again that image schemas are not biologically deterministic insofar as they work holistically with biographical / cultural meaning-templates in flourishing meaningful experiences.
instance, they often express their sincere wishes for partners to be ‘as good as they can be’ across various contexts (see Chapter 10). This in turn inspired me to tentatively explore how still-proliferated ancient Greek notions of goodwill, Comtean altruism, and circulated principles of empathy may have partly – and unconsciously – spurred interviewees’ own loving agendas via their everyday exposures to these handed-down ideals, values, etc. In this regard, a key preface must be posited. Specifically, I propose such broad templates (and others I discuss) appear to be highly porous within the ‘Western’ / ‘Anglophonic’ world, and thus, transcend singular nations or milieus.\textsuperscript{50} It is therefore prudent for me to state here that, at this point in time, my study – whilst based on certain socio-demographic variables – does not specifically strive to detail the distinct ‘Australianness’ of interviewees’ loving moments, even if cultural particularities exist (see Karandashev 2017, p. 219-232; Relationships Australia 2011; ed. Teo 2014). Instead, this study is primarily phenomenological, not classically anthropological – to which any environmental explorations are indicative of my intention to processually illustrate how interviewees’ biographical experiences of ‘being in love’ organically arise from their body-cultural situatedness. In short, I may in future decide to examine facets of interviewees’ romantic experiences that are distinctly ‘Australian’ (via cautious cross-cultural comparisons, as outlined in Chapter 13).

Nonetheless, for now, readers are invited to regard all cultural meaning-templates sections as possible ‘loose’ influences that work in discreet meaning-making tandem with personal histories and embodied structures\textsuperscript{51} – none taking precedence over the others.

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{50} Australian culture has been popularly included as an instance of ‘Western’ and Anglophonic worlds, albeit with its own key variances (see Bennett, Emmison & Frow 1999, p. 227; Driscoll 2017; During 2005, p. 19; O’Regan 1996, p. 82; Sheckels 2012, p. 148; Teo 2006, p. 171).

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{51} It is the concurrent consideration of these two other interwoven facets that separates my meaning-template analysis from the ‘discourse-only’ constructionist studies mentioned in Chapter 2.
\end{footnotesize}
The first shared quality of interviewees’ ‘ideal’ moments of ‘being in love’ relates to what I shall succinctly call ‘self-growth’. Fiona’s experiences allude to my thematic categorisation:

I reckon, like, he’s [Jack] helped me grow a lot as a person … over the years, ya know? … To me, like, it’s a big thing ‘bout why I’m so in love with him and all … I reckon he’s helped me so much with that. (Fiona)

Dan tells a comparable account, expressed in slightly different terms:

[My partner] Jane inspires me … Honestly, I think she’s made me a better person … Not just for her … [but] better for myself, too – how I ought to be. (Dan)

Ben and Rachel also convey their self-growths within their loving partnerships:

Mate, I was proper pissed [i.e. really drunk] … layin’ outside Maccas [McDonald’s], stumblin’ … Sarah [my partner] comes along, drags me home … [and] yells the living fuck outta me … [But] her shit’s good for me … I love her cause … she stops me … from bein’ a jackass … She’s gettin’ me to be a bigger bloke. (Ben)

I’m really, really prone to, um – I tend to give up on things … I feel I’m easily disheartened, I guess? … [But] Steve’s great … In some sense, I’d say he’s really good at telling me to keep going … never give up … It’s still a growing process for me … [and] he’s always been right there to support me. (Rachel)

Corroborating the above types of responses, I propose self-growth can be most simply understood as interviewees’ perceptions of ‘growing as people’ through the sustained influences of partners. I will now expand on a few subsidiary themes or ‘parts’ that make up this larger super-ordinate theme of ‘being in love’.

---

52 Keep in mind that for this and subsequent chapters, many discussed subsidiary themes are not exclusive to any one super-ordinate theme – but are nonetheless covered at specific points based on their interpreted contextual relevance. For example, interviewees’ notions of physically boundaried selfhoods are not limited to self-growth alone. However,
7.1. Experiential Themes of Self-Growth

To begin with, I contend interviewees’ ‘self-growths’ are meaningfully shaped by their preceding senses of possessing unique selfhoods – or, in more colloquial terms, their feelings of “being my own person” (Dan) and having personal identities that “make me me” (Rachel). Of course, how interviewees opt to define ‘who they are’ diverges. Fiona, for instance, usually chooses to describe herself through her various interests and hobbies:

I reckon, like, I like doing fun things, you know? … I love travelling. I love, like, ya know, seeing the world … meeting people, all that stuff … That’s me … That’s kinda who I am – I’m a globetrotter. (Fiona)

By contrast, Dan tends to pivot his identity towards his Christian beliefs, which “defines … the person I am today”. Ben and Fiona also differ in how they apprehend themselves – the former grounding his individuality in the “bonds I got with many folks” (Ben), the latter via her artistic talents that “really shapes … how I feel I’m like” (Rachel).

However, what threads these varying self-descriptions together is each interviewee’s habit of seeing his / her own selfhood as ‘something’ that resides inside his / her physical body. In other words, the existential / psychological essences of ‘who they are’ (i.e. memories, personalities, identities, etc.) are thought by them to be literally demarcated within their material boundaries. The following remarks exemplify this common underlying belief:

End of the day, I think – it’s who I am within that truly counts … not what I ought to show … or try to show … or want to show outside. (Dan)

I reckon, like, ya know – sometimes people look at me, my looks … and maybe, like, they think, “Oh, dumb blonde!” … [but] they don’t know me, ya know? … They don’t know the real me inside. (Fiona)

I’m lookin’ surface calm … [but] inside, mate, I’m pretty fuckin’ messed up … [and] no one’s known’ any wiser. (Ben)

---

I have chosen to discuss their ‘inward’ experiences here due to their descriptive prominence in relation to this shared feature of ‘being in love’.

53 I suggest part of the reason for this divergence is due to the lack of a firm English vocabulary for precisely articulating the nature of one’s own self-experiences (see Martin, Sugarman & Hickinbottom 2010, p. 3).

54 What this primordial ‘something’ is remains equivocal. For instance, Dan believes his self-experiences stem from his “God-given soul”, whilst Ben – a “no religious bullshit” atheist – sees the root of his identity as “just brain juice”.

55 The same boundaries are less figuratively definitive, since interviewees are inclined to see their selfhoods as capable of non-literal (i.e. metaphysical, conscious, imaginative, etc.) extension via social influence, personal impacts on others, etc. This experiential theme will be briefly addressed below and also expanded on at various other points of this thesis.
My art – um, I feel it really lets me … express my true inner spirit. (Rachel) [emphasis highlights ‘interior’ self-experiences]

This observation leads us to a crucial line of enquiry, namely: for interviewees, what aspect of their ‘internal’ identities do they feel develops or ‘grows’ during optimal loving conditions with beloveds? These responses offer some initial clues:

I think she’s shown me … [how] to be more patient with others … kinder … less like my old impatient self. (Dan)

He’s rubbed off on me, like, a little … I reckon I’m more grateful to people, for real … A bit like him. (Fiona)

Sarah’s a fuckin’ focused woman … [and] I’m thinkin’ – I ain’t gonna be the slacker here, mate … [So] these days … I’m more determined … I ain’t dickin’ around so much, thanks to her. (Ben)

If someone wrongs me … I feel, um – I’m better at forgiving now? … I’d say, Steve really inspires me … He’s very good at letting things go … [and] I’m inspired … to be better like that, too. (Rachel) [emphasis linked to the point below]

The above italicised words illustrate just some of interviewees’ many references to socially labelled virtues – or arête (Burger 2008, p. 47) – when expressing their self-growths within partnerships. To this degree, I postulate they are, on a general level, predisposed to treat virtues as qualities (i.e. attributes, traits, characteristics, etc.) that partly define their self-identities from within. Dan’s comments best capture this shared valuation:

Who I am, who you are … I think it boils down to – “Look, what kind of person do I want to be?” … Honestly, I think – to me, it’s all about asking – “Am I a good person? Am I an honest person?”, “Am I a caring person?” … That all comes from the heart, from inside … [and] define us … define who we are. (Dan) [emphasis on virtues as ‘internal’ selfhood qualities]

Expanding on this point, I interpret interviewees’ self-growths amidst ‘being in love’ are primarily based on their perceptions of internally developing virtuous aspects of themselves, credited mostly to partners’ ongoing influences. As interviewees claim, self-growth does not happen instantly, but rather, “takes some time” (Rachel) via long-term interactions with partners.

---

56 Interviewees seem to subscribe to the common Western cultural belief that virtues are “acquired excellences in character traits, the possession of which contributes to a person’s completeness or wholeness” (Emmons 2003, p. 121). However, not all of them agree on what virtues ‘really’ are. For instance, Dan and Rachel see them as “universal human values” (Dan) that “apply to almost everyone, everywhere” (Rachel). By contrast, Fiona and Ben assert such qualities are “really super subjective” (Fiona), open to “how folks want to see things their way” (Ben).

57 Other mentioned virtues include “wisdom” (Dan), “integrity” (Fiona), “loyalty” (Ben), and even “love” (Rachel) itself, to name a few.

58 As interviewees claim, self-growth does not happen instantly, but rather, “takes some time” (Rachel) via long-term interactions with partners.
“growing kinder” (Rachel) or being “more considerate” (Ben) – and / or relate to more general (i.e. non-specific) feelings of becoming “just, like, a good human being overall” (Fiona).

Sarah tells me … [to] quit bein’ so stone cold to just everyone … I agree, [and] I’m tryin’ … She’s teachin’ me … more compassion to some folks … don’t always mean I’m bein’ weak, know what I mean? (Ben) [emphasis on specific self-growth]

I’m really in a good place now compared to, er – I’d say, maybe three, four years ago? … Steve’s supported me so much … [with] growing … as a whole person. (Rachel) [emphasis on general self-growth]

Interviewees’ self-growths are meaningfully hinged on ‘intersubjectivity’.59 I use the term here to loosely refer to their precursive experiences of grasping someone else as “a living, thinking person … like me” (Fiona). Dan explains:

I think – some people I like, some people I don’t … [but] end of the day, honestly, they’re not that different from me … We have our own lives … all have feelings, we’re all alive … just trying to find happiness … [and] figure life out. (Dan) [emphasis on intersubjectivity]

Merged with interviewees’ internalised self-experiences, intersubjectivity thus entails their recognitions of other persons as equally existing selves that exist within bodies separate from their own.60 However, this mutual interiority does not mean each individual is fully entrapped in his / her solitudinous flesh. On the contrary, interviewees believe all persons (if they so choose) are able to direct their conscious attentions outwards from within, thus non-literally projecting ‘who they are’ beyond the boundaries of their materiality. This projection occurs via various modes of external communication (e.g. speech, gestures, interactions, expressions, etc.) that can be oriented towards other persons, things, objects, etc.

I reckon, like, everyone – no one should be afraid … to put themselves out there – like, express themselves, express who they are to the world … The thing is, ya know, life and all that – it’s way too short to stay bottled up, ya know? … We gotta let it out at some point. (Fiona)

I guess, um – I’d say it’s human nature … as in, maybe, we want to communicate ourselves … [and] talk to others … share what we’re about … share our feelings? … I feel my art does that for me. (Rachel) [emphasis on outward projections of selfhood]

59 The esoteric definition of intersubjectivity remains highly contested within phenomenological circles (see Zahavi 2001).

60 This definition is similar to Merleau-Ponty’s notion of “symmetrical experience” that involves a person’s innate ability to “perceive another bodily self [not] as a mere object … [but with] a power to perform various kinds of actions” (Romdenh-Romluc 2011, p. 138).
Such supposed abilities in self-projection are key to how interviewees regard their growths as persons amidst ‘being in love’. For starters, they think of themselves as favoured recipients and/or observers of partners’ externalising foci that are, in most cases, imagined to be partly infused by the virtuous qualities of beloveds’ internal identities.61 These receptions/observations link to their feelings of remaining ‘open-minded’ to these incoming influences so as to inspire their own specific and/or general virtuous self-developments.62

61 These experiences are most relevant during harmonious times of a relationship – less so during arguments, disagreements, etc.

62 At the same time, interviewees are selective in which virtues they remain open to. For instance, Ben disagrees with Sarah for being “too patient with shit-bags sometimes” – even if, in general, he appreciates her overall patience as a virtue. Nonetheless, he is not keen to be too inspired by this quality, simply stating “I ain’t patient, period” (Ben). Other interviewees expressed similar practices of picking the virtues they most wish to be inspired by, whilst overlooking (but still often respecting) those felt to be less suited for themselves.

63 There are of course a few notable exceptions to this. Dan, for instance, says his father has had a profound impact on “my values … as a man” whilst Fiona thinks of her best friend, Fran, as the main reason “I’ve got more courage these days”.

Experiences of self-growth are of course not exclusive to interviewees’ optimal moments of ‘being in love’. For example, they frequently describe how many other relations – including those with close friends, special acquaintances, etc. – all help in some form or another with their personal developments. However, for the most part, all interviewees seem to largely prioritise their intimate ties with partners as key sources of virtuous flourishing.63 Rachel’s opinion sheds light on this cross-interviewee valuation:

Steve always tries to bring out the best in me, I feel … um, more than most people … I’d say, it’s how it is … [in a] truly loving relationship … He gives me … the best kind of support … to improve myself. (Rachel) [emphasis on romantic relations as a major impetus of self-growth].

This begs the question: why do interviewees see partners as prime influencers of self-growth? Here, I propose this is partly due to their penchant for idealising their beloveds (Person 2007, p. 163) – in particular, their moderated habits of “embellish[ing] their partners’ virtues, while … turning a blind eye to their faults” (Murray, Holmes & Griffin 1996, p. 1155) (see Section 7.3 for
more). To be clear, the extent of this idealising process varies from interviewee to interviewee. Yet, what bonds these experiences is their shared propensities for regarding beloveds in more virtuous lights compared to most other persons – in effect, presenting interviewees with likelier and/or preferred chances for their own internal improvements.

Jane’s the best girlfriend ever ... one of the best persons I know ... I think, honestly, end of the day – I think she’s more mature than most women her age. (Dan)

He’s got his head screwed on right ... I reckon, like, ya know, he’s not like most other guys his age ... running ‘bout drunk with his mates ... I reckon he’s better than all that. (Fiona)

She got more balls than most folks ... I ain’t seen any chick so thick-skinned as her ... She good at gettin’ shit done, know what I mean? (Ben)

There’s really so many things I like about him ... No one really compares. (Rachel) [emphasis on partner idealisation]

This non-exhaustive discussion highlights some of interviewees’ thematic experiences that, together, shape their perceptions of growing as people during ‘ideal’ states of ‘being in love’. I now turn my focus to evaluating how any entailing lived meanings are in fact grounded in their nascent learnings of numerous image schemas.

7.2. Image Schemas of Self-Growth

First off, I suggest interviewees’ elaborate impressions of self-growth are intimately dependent on the SCALE image schema. Johnson describes this recurring embodied logic as an “experientially basic, value-laden structure ... [that] is one of the most pervasive image schematic structures in our understanding” (1987, p. 123). He further explains:

The SCALE schema is basic to both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of our experience. With respect to the quantitative aspects, we experience our world as populated with discrete objects that we can group in various ways and substances whose amount we can increase and decrease. We can add objects to a group or pile, and we can take objects away. We can add more of a substance to a pile or container, and we can take it away. With respect to the qualitative aspects, we experience objects and events as having certain degrees of intensity. One light is brighter than another, one potato is hotter than another, one blue is deeper than another, and one

64 For example, Rachel is regularly enthusiastic in heralding Steve’s many virtues, often referring to him along the lines of “my better half”. Meanwhile, Fiona is less inclined to overlook Jack’s “irritating, annoying habits” – although she, too, usually focuses more on praising his various virtuous qualities.

65 To reiterate a point made in Chapter 6, the following discussion (and similar others) only scratches the surface of a vast spectrum of schemas that enable interviewees’ embodied grasps of their experiences. Regardless, I hope what is covered will awaken readers’ newfound interests in the body’s pivotal meaning-making role with regards to love.
pain is more intense than another … Our world is experienced partly in terms of more, less, and the same. We can have more, less or the same number of objects, amount of substance, degree of force, or intensity of sensation. This ‘more’ or ‘less’ aspect of human experience is the basis of the SCALE schema. (1987, p. 122; see Clausner & Croft 1999; Popova 2005)

In other words, it is via our implicit bodily acumen of SCALE that we are capable of discerning certain changes in objects, substances, senses, properties, degrees, intensities, etc. These changes are relational insofar as they centre on elementary senses of something becoming more, less, or staying the same from their originally perceived states (Johnson 1987, p. 122). Further to this, Johnson proposes this “image schema … [first] emerges in our [embodied] experiences of concrete, physical entities [and] is figuratively extended to cover abstract entities of every sort” (1987, p. 123). This includes “metaphorical extensions [from which] we are able to comprehend virtually every aspect of our experience in terms of scalarity” (Johnson 1987, p. 124).

Here, I invite readers to consider how the very idea of growth is in itself meaningfully defined as “the process of increasing in amount, value, or importance” (‘Growth’ 2017, n.d.) [emphasis added]. In our current context, this increase is imaginatively linked to interviewees’ many allusions to developing / enhancing / bettering their virtuous qualities (e.g. becoming more compassionate, patient, loyal, etc.). At initial glance, these meanings appear highly abstract, bearing little debt to the body. However, probing deeper, we realise such complex references would in fact be utterly unfathomable (or, at least, drastically altered) without the latent structural support of SCALE. To this end, I argue it is interviewees’ mostly cognitively unconscious recognitions of this corporeally-rooted image schema that, in the first place, empowers them to make creative sense of their figurative growths as persons vis-à-vis ‘being in love’. The subsequent responses offer subtle hints at this schematic reliance:

I think, yeah – it [this relationship] turned me … into more of the kind of man I want to be. (Dan)

I reckon, like, I’ve grown more cheerful … cause of Jack. (Fiona)

Sarah puts me in my place, mate … I’m less hot-headed. (Ben)

More specific than Johnson, Popova explores how our sensorial organs (for vision, hearing, taste, etc.) play key roles in “provid[ing] the experiential grounding for scalarity construal of perceptual properties” (Popova 2005, p. 395). Neuroscientific research (e.g. Belin et al. 1998, Schrater, Knill & Simoncelli 2001, etc.) lend credibility to this claim.

See also the related image schema of EXPANSION (Turner 1991, p. 171).
I really feel, um – my confidence’s improved a lot … He coaxes me … out of my shell. (Rachel)

“emphasis on relational meanings invariably reliant on SCALE” 68

Interviewees’ self-growths are also quietly hinged on recurring patterns of CONTAINER. As briefly explained in Chapter 3, the core features of this embodied logic “consist of a boundary distinguishing an interior from an exterior … [that] defines the most basic distinctions of IN and OUT” (Lakoff 1987, p. 271). Like other schemas, these distinctions do not remain rudimentary but are instead metaphorically extended to inform a whole host of complex CONTAINER-based conceptions. One such conception pertains to the ways many of us come to think of our existences and orientations in the world. Johnson states:

… we tend to define both our physical and mental identities by virtue of their containment (within “bodies” and “minds”) … When such a CONTAINER scheme is superimposed we experience the center as inner and define the outer relative to it. Likewise, we perceive this same INNER-OUTER orientation for objects existing in our perceptual field, and by extension, to certain abstract objects (e.g., models, theories, geometrical figures) … The INNER-OUTER pattern also supports the imposition of a SUBJECT-OBJECT orientation, in which our subjectivity is defined in terms of that which is inmost or central to our conscious being … This “inmost” dimension gives rise, in turn, to a SELF-OTHER distinction, which can have the MINE-THINE valuation imposed upon it. (1987, p. 125)

Johnson’s exposition resonates with interviewees’ beliefs in internalised selfhoods. As I have shown, each of them sees himself / herself as an individual who exists within his / her physical body, to which his / her material barrier separates ‘who he / she is’ on the inside from what resides outside. In essence, I suggest these kinds of self-experiences are inseparably reliant on the CONTAINER schema that quietly structures their elaborate ‘in / out / boundaried’ meanings of ‘who they are’ – in short, their everyday evocations of the A PERSON IS A CONTAINER metaphor (Kövecses 2000, p. 90). The same schematic metaphor also flourishes their intersubjective regards of other persons as equally CONTAINED but differentiated selves.

Honestly, I think it’s hard to tell … what someone’s really like inside. (Dan)

Ya know, if I let out ... my crazy inner side ... they’d [my YouTube viewers] all unsubscribe! (laughs) (Fiona)

I got somethin’ in me … [that’s] always wantin’ to stir up folks. (Ben)

---

68 This form of schematic evidencing (also seen throughout this thesis) is of course not ‘scientifically’ definitive. Nonetheless, it is the best interpretative approach available that suffices in showing readers how many of interviewees’ descriptions, phrases, metaphors, etc. would be impossible for both them and us to comprehend if not for our shared embodied grasps of pervasive, albeit implicit, schematic experiences – as per Johnson’s reasoning.
I feel, um – I’d say, most people are good on the inside. (Rachel) [emphasis on CONTAINED-dependent notions of selfhood]

PATH is another image schema of possible relevance. Johnson explains:

Our lives are filled with paths that connect up our spatial world . . . Some of these paths involve an actual physical surface that you traverse, such as the path from your house to the store. Others involve a project path, such as the path of a bullet shot into the air. And certain paths exist, at present, only in your imagination, such as the path from Earth to the nearest star outside our solar system . . . In every case of PATHS there are always the same parts: (1) a source, or starting point; (2) a goal, or endpoint; and (3) a sequence of contiguous locations connecting the source with the goal [i.e. direction]. Paths are thus routes for moving from one point to another. (1987, p. 113; see Figure 3)

I propound interviewees’ attributions of self-growth to partners’ influences are discreetly composed of overlaying extensions of SCALE, CONTAINER, and PATH. Specifically, they value beloveds as individuals whose virtuous qualities emerge from within ‘who they are’ (i.e. othered self as source of PATH / A PERSON IS A CONTAINER). Amidst ‘being in love’, this emergence is often thought to be focused towards themselves, others, activities, etc. (i.e. directed PATH of conscious attention), eventually inspiring their own internal developments (i.e. self as endpoint of PATH / A PERSON IS A CONTAINER / qualitative SCALE of virtues). Again, such meanings may at first seem purely ideational – but, in actuality, find their bodily genesis (and constraints) in schematic logics:

I don’t think anyone else’s . . . given so much of herself to me. (Dan) [emphasis on from-to nature of CONSCIOUSNESS IS A PATH metaphor]

I reckon, the love I get from Jack . . . it’s changed me inside, a little bit. (Fiona) [emphasis on overlays of CONSCIOUSNESS IS A PATH / A PERSON IS A CONTAINER]

Mate, I’m lucky she sees anythin’ in me . . . Me bein’ me, I’m lucky she even pays any attention to me . . . [and thinks] I’m worth helpin’ [to] be a better bloke. (Ben) [emphasis on overlays of A PERSON IS A CONTAINER / CONSCIOUSNESS IS A PATH / VIRTUE IS A SCALE]

---

69 Another aspect of PATH is the concurrent passing of time as an object, person, imagined thing, etc. moves from a start to endpoint (Moser 2000, n.p.).

70 These PATH and SCALE-inspired imaginings respectively suggest interviewees’ usages of CONSCIOUSNESS IS A PATH and VIRTUE IS A SCALE metaphors.
When he speaks to people, to his audience [i.e. potential clients] … he always really speaks from his heart … I’d say, um, he inspires me … [to] maybe put more of my own sincerity … into my art? (Rachel) [emphasis on overlays of CONSCIOUSNESS IS A PATH / VIRTUE IS A SCALE]

Unfortunately, there is not enough room here to fully explore all schematic possibilities. Still, the above discussion amply illustrates how interviewees’ embodied learnings of image schemas provide implicit structuring order to their more elaborate experiences / meanings of self-growth.

7.3. Cultural Meaning-Templates of Self-Growth

In organic tandem to image schemas / biographical nuances, interviewees’ environmental contexts offer prevalent meaning-templates that, via taken-for-granted socialisation, partly steer how they interpret their embodied experiences of self-growth. To begin with, I contend their general wishes to become more virtuous persons seem to echo the handed-down cultural impact of ‘virtue ethics’ (see Hursthouse 2016) – a strand of ethical thought stretching back to the zenith of Greek culture and even Ancient China (Russell 2013, p. 1). What sets virtue ethics apart from other schools of morality (e.g. deontology, utilitarianism, etc.) is “that it treats ethics as concerned with one whole’s life – and not just those [specific] occasions when something with a distinctive ‘moral’ quality is at stake” (Russell 2013, p. 2). A core tenet is thus placed on “all of one’s choices with such personal qualities as kindness, courage, wisdom, and integrity” (Russell 2013, p. 2) to which “the primary focus of moral evaluation is neither [external] action nor outcome, but [internal] character” (Haldane 1999, p. 160). As further explained by Russell:

… virtue ethics began not with the question “What is the right thing to do?” but with the question “What is the best way to live?” … [It] concerns what to do with one’s life and how to make it a happy one. Answering these questions involves, among other things, reflecting on what sort of person to be and what sort of character to develop. And it is here that practical reasoning leads to thought about the virtues, excellences of character that consist in both caring about the right sorts of things and having the wisdom and practical skills to judge and act successfully with respect to these things. (2013, p. 7)

Whilst unaware of its esoteric aspects, interviewees’ casual self-reflections on growing as persons (both within and outside of their partnerships) silently parallel many enduring messages and

---

Again, to drive home a key point raised in Chapter 6, my non-exhaustive considerations of cultural meaning-templates here and elsewhere should not be taken as strict causal explanations – merely illustrative of how sedimented ideals, mythologies, beliefs, etc. play a simultaneous part in stirring the meaningfulness of interviewees’ biographical / schematic experiences.
concerns of virtue ethics. For instance, they frequently speak of the importance of embodying specific moral qualities (i.e. kindness, patience, etc.), and often relate these to the overall flourishing of their lives, happiness, and self-identities. Based on the A PERSON IS A CONTAINER metaphor, they also express desires for internal character improvements that, to them, are the ‘real’ measurements of trying to be ‘fulfilled’ persons.

I think, yeah, end of the day – I just want to try to be a good person … I honestly try to be kind … to show compassion … to have some sort of inner peace … That to me, I think – that’s how I want my life to be … That’s how I want to live happy … [and] yeah, I think – have some sort of meaningful life. (Dan)

I reckon, like – my big thing is … being more honest with myself … being more honest with others … I was kinda fake in the past … [and] like, I reckon I was so miserable … At least now – like, I’m getting there, kinda … I’m much more complete … I, like – I still struggle on bad days … [but at least] I’m keeping myself honest … [and] it helps a lot in my life, I reckon. (Fiona)

Ain’t afraid to admit it, mate – I’m a bloody bludger [i.e. slang for an ‘extremely lazy person’] … [but] I’m workin’ hard gettin’ my shit together … I’m gettin’ more disciplined, hard-workin’ … [and] I’m startin’ to think – fuck, maybe I’m worth somethin’ … My life’s worth somethin’ … I ain’t muckin’ about the place. (Ben)

I guess, um – I suffer from, um, a lot of self-doubt? … I question myself heaps … [But] I really feel – I know if I’m more confident, I’m better off … in my life … It’s about fighting that inner voice of mine … [and] winning my happiness. (Rachel) [emphasis hints at sedimented influences of virtue ethics in relation to self-growth]

Aristotle’s still-proliferated ideals in Western cultures (Adler 1997; Barnes 2000) also seem to have a nascent bearing on how interviewees envision their personal developments (even if they do not convey any direct learnings of his work). In brief, the Greek philosopher professed that every person should strive to lead a good life of human flourishing and well-being, thus enjoying an eudaimonic existence (Deci & Ryan 2008; Waterman 1990). However, this development ideally does not occur in isolation, but rather, via open-minded and communicative relations with others. As clarified by Sherman, an Aristotelian scholar:

Aristotle insists as a requirement of virtue that we be open to enquiry and a reflective grasp of our ends. This includes reflection on our ends, conceived not abstractly but embodied and clothed in concrete circumstances. Only in this way do we actively reflect on our selves and on our lives. As we have said, the virtuous agent lives a life in intimate union with others similarly committed to virtue. Through collaboration on projects and through listening to and identifying with the viewpoints of others, an agent’s vision becomes expanded and enlarged. (1989, p. 30)

---

72 In an Aristotelian sense, the most ideal pathway to achieve such a goal is the cultivation of personal virtues that define “what is worth desiring and worth having in life” (Telfer 1980, p. 37). This requires an individual’s willingness to work towards his/her full potential, aptitudes, and talents to “live in accordance with [his or her] daimon or ‘true self’” (Waterman 1990, p. 39).
I opine this highly influential (albeit seldom overtly recognised) aspect of Aristotle’s lingering ethics has at least partially primed interviewees to value their intersubjective partnerships (and other selective relations) as key catalysts for their own virtuous growths. Fiona descriptions, resonating with those of other interviewees, lends some plausibility to this observation:

It’s easy, like – for people to get stuck in our own bubble, ya know? … [But] I reckon, like – that’s not the real best way to go ‘bout life … I love learning from others … I like to, like – listen and learn and feel inspired … I’m not gonna be half as adventurous if Fran didn’t inspire me … Jack showed me how to truly love … Stuff like that – ya know, it makes me think – that’s the best way to improve myself, for real. (Fiona) [emphasis alludes to virtuous growth via intersubjective communication, culturally akin to Aristotle’s tenet]

Interviewees’ vernacular reliance on the A PERSON IS A CONTAINER metaphor\(^73\) appear to be symptomatic of popular notions of selfhood in Western, but not all, societies. Sampson explains:

Most of us in the West today would subscribe to three relatively simple and seemingly ‘natural’ ideas: (1) the boundary of the individual is coincident with the boundary of the body; (2) the body is a container that houses the individual; (3) the individual is best understood as a self-contained entity. Point (1) clearly connects the notion of the individual with the idea of a skin-encased body … Point (2) observes that bodies are very much like containers which house everything that is vital about the person … [including] the psychological characteristics they possess … Point (3) simply completes the picture, telling us that if the individual is a body and the body is a container, then it would seem to follow that the individual must be a self-contained entity. (2003 p. 125)\(^74\)

All three ideas are indeed voiced within interviewees’ accounts of their own and imaginings of others’ self-experiences. As their earlier responses consistently show (which I will not repeat here), selfhood is for them internalised, boundaried by their physicalities. Moreover, personal characteristics such as virtues are conceived to be qualities that partially define ‘who they are’ on the inside, housed within their bodies. To this end, I suggest interviewees’ self-growths amidst ‘being in love’ are tacitly intuited by the aforementioned cultural meaning-template, persuading them to imagine partners as physically / psychologically distinct selves capable of stirring their own separate introspective developments.

Interviewees’ idealisations of beloveds as (mostly) virtuous persons appear to invoke a canonical dimension of Western cultural expressions of ‘romantic love’. As Karandashev highlights:

The essential feature of romantic love [in the West] is admiration and idealization of a partner. The partner is viewed in an idealized image, with an exaggeration of positive characteristics and an extenuation of the shortcomings. A romantic love transfers the positive attitudes from one

\(^73\) For a more in-depth discussion on a closely related metaphor, see Kövecses (1990, p. 144-159).  
\(^74\) Baumeister (1987) presents a brief historical analysis that covers the gradual cultural internalisation of selfhood in Western cultures.
quality of a partner to another and further elevates unrealistic and idealistic attitudes and expectations of a partner and relationship … Romantic lovers tend to amplify positive and overlook negative characteristics of their partners, and they glamorize and exaggerate their virtues. (2017, p. 266)

As I outlined before, interviewees do not practice equal degrees of idealisation. Still, in general, all of them spend notably more time heralding their beloveds’ numerous virtues over criticising their perceived vices. In my view, such habits strongly hint at their largely subliminal awarenesses of the above thriven romantic standards. This is indicated by previous excerpts – and further exemplified here with Rachel’s exaltations.

Steve’s really my soulmate … Of course, um – I’d say, he has his darker days, so do I … [but] I feel, really – he’s really one of the nicest guys I know? … He’s wonderful more than anything … I really couldn’t ask for a more patient partner. (Rachel) [emphasis on idealising processes]

In sum, this section has explored a few possible cultural meaning-templates that, in synchrony with biographical / schematic factors, may have contributed to interviewees idiographic perceptions of growing as people in the intimate wake of their loving relations.

### 7.4. Conclusion

To recap, I have delineated several interlacing thematic experiences of interviewees’ self-growths qua their ‘ideal’ moments of ‘being in love’. These experiences are meaningfully centered on their: 1) impressions of people’s unique individualities boundaried within bodies, 2) valuations of virtues as metaphysical qualities that partly define their own and others’ internalised selfhoods, 3) desires to develop such specific / overall qualities, particularly (but not exclusively) motivated by their intersubjective receptions / observations of partners’ incoming influences (e.g. actions, gestures, speeches, etc.), 4) idealisations of their romantic partnerships, thus prioritising beloveds as persons more likely to inspire their own virtuous growths. All these subsidiary themes ensue via a holistic unfolding of interviewees’ biographical, schematic, and cultural impulses, some of which I have discussed.

---

75 See May (2011) for a historical account of how romantic love came to be intertwined with idealisation. Murray, Holmes & Griffin (1996) also detail some of the salient features of modern romantic idealisation, with empirical support. Readers should however note that some scholars (e.g. Bauman 2003; Giddens 1992, etc.) suggest the general phenomenon to be far less relevant to current Western cultural contexts.
In the next chapter, I examine interviewees’ shared experiences of ‘friendship’ which, in my opinion, serve as yet another super-ordinate theme that invigorates their peak loving conditions with current partners.
8. Friendship

“Here and there on earth we may encounter a kind of continuation of love in which this possessive craving of two people for each other gives way to a new desire and lust for possession – a shared higher thirst for an ideal above them … Its right name is friendship.”

(Nietzsche 1974, p. 89)

A second super-ordinate theme centres on interviewees’ experiences of enjoying ‘friendships’ with partners – a shared element of their ‘ideal’ moments of ‘being in love’. Dan explains:

Jane’s my best friend … I think – we’ve been friends for – oh, six, seven years, about there? … End of the day, I dunno – I can’t imagine saying I’m in love with her … and not see at least part of it … as our strong friendship. (Dan)

Other interviewees concur, offering further insights on their befriended beloveds:

Ain’t all days but most days, we’re gettin’ on ace … [with the] same vibe … same attitude … We’re two peas in a pod … friends – plus sex and shit … I’m thinkin’ there ain’t better ways … to be in love. (Ben)

We’re similar in some kinda, like, weird way, ya know? … I reckon, like, I can’t say “I love my boyfriend!” without saying ‘friend’, can I? … The friend bit’s a big deal to me … It’s like, our glue … [that] keeps us together and stuff like that. (Fiona)

Back then [before we were dating], I feel – I’d say, we already really had a lot in common as friends … We’re very alike … We’re much more [than friends] now … [but] as in, um – I’d say, he’s still someone I’d still call my friend? … He’s a friend slash partner. (Rachel)

From responses like these, I interpret interviewees’ friendships amidst their intimate relations entail their imaginative senses of being grouped with partners, partly based on perceived interpersonal commonalities. I will now explore the thematic nuances of this broad experiential claim.
8.1. Experiential Themes of Friendship

On an esoteric level, many authors and researchers have traditionally treated ‘friendship’ and ‘romantic love’ as two conveniently separated realms of experience. However, at least in our current contexts, interviewees are far more inclined to see their ‘friendships’ with partners as conditional aspects of (rather than neatly secluded from) their ‘ideal’ feelings of ‘being in love’.

These responses paint a clear picture:

- Every good love story has some sort of friendship… I think, that’s one reason why… we work so well… Honestly, we as friends… makes our love function better. (Dan)

- We’ve been friends… for, like, quite long, ya know?… I reckon, like, it’s a big thing… [that’s] help us come so far… [with] our intimacy… [and] being in love and all that. (Fiona)

- Mate, I got lots of bad romances in the past – like that stupid [Lady] Gaga song… Sarah’s more solid, mate… I got proper respect for her… If I ain’t seein’ her as a good partner… [and] as a friend – somethin’ ain’t right. (Ben)

- I feel, I guess, um – actually, our friendship’s probably really one of the most important reasons… why I love him. (Rachel)

This brings us to a pertinent question, namely: what are some of the key experiences flourishing interviewees’ ‘romantic friendships’ (henceforth referred to as such)? To this end, I propose ‘commonality’ and ‘grouping’ to be two defining aspects of this super-ordinate theme, each meaningfully intermingling with the other.

For starters, I use the term ‘commonality’ (or common ground) as an interpreted shorthand for interviewees’ ongoing desires to identify, cultivate, and / or maintain shared interests, values,
beliefs, dispositions, attitudes, hobbies, goals, etc. within their intimate relationships. As described by Dan and Rachel:

We’re both strict vegans … [and] I think, yeah – veganism’s one of those good bonding experience for us … I think she gets it the same way I do … She cares about our environment, the animals – same way I do … We’ve the same belief in that … [and] honestly, I think it’s important … we keep nurturing each other on that path. (Dan)

There’s heaps of things we both like … We, er, we have this really guilty pleasure … watching heaps of really, really bad movies together – so-bad-their-good movies … [Also] I’m an artist, he’s not … [but] we’re really into the same type of art – Impressionism, Postmodernism … We’ve lots in common. (Rachel) [emphasis highlights aspects of ‘commonality’]

Such feelings of enjoying common ground often leads to interviewees’ impressions of attaining “a similar style of mind or way of thinking” (Telfer 1970, p. 227) to beloveds. ‘Similarity’ in this case is highly processual and imaginative, in that interviewees are constantly reflecting on their own self-characteristics whilst also trying to intuitively gauge (from within their own experiences) if partners are on ‘the same qualitative page’ as them. However, they also clarify how achieving similar mindsets need not happen in an inflexible ‘absolute’ sense – only in overall or thereabout ways.

We’re teed-up, most times … I’m sizin’ her out … seein’ if we’re seein’ eye to eye … Most times, I’m gatherin’ she ain’t too far away from where I’m at … what I’m thinkin’. (Ben) [emphasis highlights similarity via concurrent self / partner gauges]

I reckon, like – I’m riled up … [over] my crazy ass mum … [and] Jack’s, like, “Relax, chill, babe!” … He’s too relaxed sometimes … We’re not, like – sometimes we’ve different tempers … [but] I reck on, day-to-day stuff and all that … we’re very similar … very chilled and all that. (Fiona) [emphasis on approximate rather than absolute similarity]

Interviewees’ experiences of similarity are composed of diverse, albeit equally defining, facets. On the most salient level, they describe their feelings of sharing certain identical personal characteristics with partners, based on perceived joint affinities to various ‘things of the world’ (e.g. belief systems, activities, cultural artefacts, attitudes, etc.). At the same time, they also express

---

78 What these interpersonal commonalities are varies from interviewee to interviewee. For instance, Dan sees the common grounds he has with Jane mostly in terms of broader belief systems (e.g. Christianity, veganism, etc.). Meanwhile, Fiona focuses more on shared activities such as travelling as a couple, whilst Ben and Rachel speak regularly about mutual everyday attitudes. Yet, in all these cases, interviewees were consistent in stressing how these feelings of sharing-ness largely aid in defining their romantic friendships.

79 Interviewees vary on how similar they think their partners are to them. For instance, Rachel sees Steve as “really heaps like me” whilst Fiona describes herself as being “kinda similar [to Jack] but not always”. Nonetheless, all of them agree that feeling mostly (but not necessarily entirely) alike to their beloveds is a key factor to their romantic friendships, and by extension, their optimal moments of ‘being in love’.
how similarity can (quite ironically) be forged through differing stances. In such cases, like-mindedness does not lie with possessing the exact same traits, views, interests, etc. per se. Rather, it arises through their impressions of both parties having similarly sincere intentions to understand and relate with each other, despite possible interpersonal variances. Ben and Rachel convey both these aspects:

Jane’s honestly very disciplined with her work – like me … I think, yeah, we’ve that in common … I think – we [also] see our [Christian] faith much the same … Our faith connects us. (Dan) [emphasis on similarity through identical characteristics].

Steve’s into city life … I’m, um, not so much? … [But] I really feel – um, I guess I’d say we’re similar, as in – we really feel each other out … I understand why he’d want to live in a big city … [just as] he knows why – I guess, um, in some sense, he knows why I prefer a slower pace … We’ve this mutual understanding … [of] where we’re getting at. (Rachel) [emphasis highlights similarity through common efforts to understand and relate]

On some occasions, interviewees suggest similarities happen in a natural fashion – something that “just clicks … with us” (Fiona) without needing too much conscious effort. However, for many other instances, developing (approximately) parallel ways of thinking requires some work. More specifically, they believe interpersonal concordances must be actively fostered over time through extensive interactions, projects, and other forms of communication with beloveds. These likeness-garnering activities must also feel voluntary (not obligatory), both to themselves and their readings of partners’ motivations. Dan’s response captures the essence of these cross-interviewee experiences:

We’ve always gotten along … I think, cause we’re so alike to begin with … [But] the way I see it – I think, there’s times we’ve made the effort … to keep talking … share ourselves … work as a team … [so that] we know – yeah, we’re on the same page … When there’s two people – end of the day … you need to … commit to that. (Dan) [emphasis stresses active and voluntary efforts for similarity]

Together with commonality, interviewees’ romantic friendships are also defined by ‘grouping’. In succinct terms, this experiential theme hinges on their feelings of figuratively connecting into a two-person (selfhood-with-selfhood) bond with beloveds.

Our friendship’s … one of our bonds … [that] brings us together. (Dan)

---

80 Interviewees’ long-term commonalities also seem especially dependent on ‘reciprocity’ – a super-ordinate theme to be covered in Chapter 11.

81 For interviewees, such imaginative groupings do not entail an abandoning of their personal identities per se. Rather, these bonds are merely an added association with partners that transcends, yet remains perpetually informed by, their own individualities. Put simply, each interviewee remains ‘self-contained’ (but capable of ‘opening up’) within the jointly created ‘containment’ of romantic friendship.
I reckon, like, ya know – we’ve partners … but we’re also friends … [We’ve] a real kinda connection. (Fiona)

Too right, mate – friendship’s better than none … [We’re] fuckin’ joined at the hip. (Ben)

I feel, um, our bond – it’s, um – it’s not just the sex … It’s us two as friends, too. (Rachel)

On a relational level, interviewees’ descriptions of their befriending groupings are extremely evocative of Spiegelberg’s phenomenological attempt to express the formation of ‘we-unions’. According to him, we-unions are key experiential events that signal the cognitive ‘shift’ from “‘you and I’ and even ‘I and thou’ [into] the single pronoun ‘we’” (1973, p. 142), in which:

… each [person] abandons his separateness (though not his individuality) and enters an embracing whole, whose parts dovetail … In this sense and to this extent they might be said to identify and become ‘solidaric’ through a kind of ‘soldering’ which embeds them into a ‘solid’ unit … This change … should be described even more concretely by attending to the experiences in each partner, such as their feeling no longer separate and alone, but of being ‘together’, ‘united’, ‘at one’, or ‘merged’ … Union is [thus] not merely a matter of removing distance, physical or social, but the establishment of a new positive relationship within the union. It means that its partners not only ‘touch,’ but ‘embrace’ one another in a non-literal sense. By these terms I mean to suggest that each partner tries to include the other and his experience within his own parallel experience (“I experience you as experiencing happiness”), to participate or share in it. (1973, p. 142)

Expanding from Spiegelberg, I interpret interviewees’ experiences of being grouped with partners are in part meaningfully inferred through their creative processes of differentiation. These processes entail their imaginative bounding of an inclusive two-person ‘we’ (i.e. that defines a romantic friendship) juxtaposed with a world of others (i.e. those excluded from this specific non-literal union). Ben and Rachel give keen insights:

Mate, I’m sayin’ to her, tellin’ her … “Don’t listen to your friends sayin’ shit!” … They’re always thinkin’ they know us best … [But] they ain’t us … We’re the couple … We’re the ones bein’ friends for ages – not them. (Ben)

I really feel, um – well, I’d say, every friendship’s unique, every relationship’s unique … Same for me and Steve … We’re our own relationship … just between us two … no one else. (Rachel)

Such bounding alludes to another solidaric shift, from which two bonded persons “‘turn their faces’ and ‘move together’, as it were” (1973, p. 141). According to Spiegelberg, this ‘turning’ is figurative, to the extent “I do not mean that they [literally] abandon their face-to-face relationship

82 The mutuality of this bounding seems to again be heavily dependent on ‘reciprocity’ (see Chapter 11).
… [only that they] face outward from a new common station” (1973, p. 141). Framed to our
discussion, I observe interviewees’ romantic friendship groupings are partly experienced as a
mutually created dyadic orientation that ushers in their abstract senses of ‘looking out’ together
with partners at various ‘things of the world’. However, rather than being antisocial or isolative,
these unions are felt by them to be meaningfully linked to other interpersonal groupings, activities,
interactions, objects, cultural frames, etc. This relational mode of meaning-making is best explained by Dan and Fiona:

*I don’t think we’re lost in our own world … or any of that romantic fluff … The way I see it, I
think … we love experiencing things together … It’s different … from me on my own … We
met new people together … learn about new things together … It’s refreshing. (Dan)*

*Ya know, I reckon, like – we were kinda closed-minded about … spirituality and meditation and
all that stuff … [but then] we went to India … [and] it changed, like, how we see things, ya
know? … There’s lotsa times now, I reckon … we expose ourselves to new adventures … step
out of our boxes … discover new stuff around us. (Fiona) [emphasis on the life-world
relationality of dyadic orientations]*

Interviewees’ groupings are also highly biographical, insofar as they are conceived by them as
experiential outcomes of both their partners’ and own unique and constantly evolving
individualities (including life-histories, memories, fore-conceptions, aspirations, etc.). Rachel’s
remarks exemplify:

*Steve had a hard life early on … I feel, um – his past … influenced who he is today … filled
him with determination … I’d say, I’m, er – I’m really a bit more sheltered …[but] I’ve met
more kinds of people … I really feel, in some sense – us two – we bring our own special take on
life, our own experiences … to our bond … as a couple … [and as] friends. (Rachel) [emphasis
highlights two individualities shaping romantic friendships]*

Interviewees do not appraise their romantic friendships in equal light. Dan, for example, exalts
Mary as “my absolute best friend” – an elevated “lifetime bond” unlike anything else. By contrast,
Fiona is more reserved, describing Jack as just “one of … a few solid friends I got”. Yet, despite
these diverse valuations, all of them veer towards idealising their beloved groupings as being

---

83 Concurrently, these co-created groupings are also thought by interviewees to further mould both parties’ individual self-experiences, thus ensuing cyclical processes of meaning-making. In other words, for them, it is ‘me’ and ‘him / her’ that create an ‘us’ – to which this mutual bond can in turn influence ‘who I am’ and ‘who he / she is’, that then continues to evolve how ‘we’ are, and so on.

84 This experiential observation relates to their general idealisation of beloveds, as discussed in Chapter 7.
comparatively ‘stronger’, ‘deeper’, and / or more ‘lasting’ than most (but not necessarily all) other friendships they may have:

I think – honestly, I’ve a stronger connection with her … than almost anyone I can think of. (Dan)

We, ya know – I reckon we’ve something deeper … compared to, like, most of my casual friends. (Fiona)

I’ve lost many mates … [but] we’re goin’ on much longer … than normal folks. (Ben)

I feel, um, they’re [fair-weathered friends] really touch and go … We’re heaps more resilient [i.e. stronger]. (Rachel) [emphasis on romantic friendship qualities relative to most others]

Both the entwining commonality and grouping of interviewees’ romantic friendships are experientially prospered by their desires for ‘self-authenticity’. I will elaborate on varying dimensions of this theme throughout latter chapters. Within our current context, this crucial notion seems to flourish via three overlaying imaginative styles. First, interviewees stress the importance of committing ‘who they really are’ to their mutual bonds. What counts as ‘real’ here is discerned via their earnest motivations to minimise inconsistencies / maximise congruencies between their own self-assessments (i.e. evaluations of their internal identities, including thoughts, interests, beliefs, etc.) and their outward personal expressions directed towards beloveds.

Honestly, end of the day – I don’t think it’s possible … to hide from the voice in my head … [that] knows the real me … [With Jane] I let that voice out … [to] let her know what I’m truly thinking. (Dan)

Ya know, I reckon, like – if I’m feeling something inside – like, even if it’s rude and stuff like that … I say it to him, as is … [otherwise] I reckon I’m not being honest to myself … and him. (Fiona) [emphasis on self-authenticity as the reducing of discrepancies / heightening of matches between internal and outwardly expressed selves]

A second imaginative style of self-authenticity involves interviewees’ simultaneous gauges of partners’ willingness to equally invest their ‘true selves’ into romantic friendships. In other words,

---

85 These broad qualities (and other closely related references by interviewees) are each deserving of their own extensive phenomenological analysis. However, doing so lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

86 Interviewees defer in their general opinions on the extent a person can actually be ‘fully self-authentic’. For instance, Dan and Rachel believe they are able to “express all of me” (Dan) without needing to “hold back anything” (Rachel). On the other hand, Fiona and Ben attest “there’s always … gonna be a part of me … only I know” (Fiona) since “it ain’t likely … I’ll lay … all my cards on the table” (Ben). Nonetheless, each of them asserts the importance of always trying one’s best to be as authentic as possible within romantic friendships.
they try to access if beloveds are doing the same as them in making an effort to align internally discerned / externally conveyed identities.

*I’m always bein’ upfront with her ... [and] I’m seein’ no less from her, mate, what I can tell … We try keepin’ things honest.* (Ben)

*I guess, um, I’d say I’m really very transparent ... with who I am with him ... He is, too, to me ... We’re really open … [That’s] very important to our bond ... [as] partners and friends.* (Rachel) [emphasis highlights intuitions of partners’ mutual self-authenticities]

Third, interviewees tend to imagine their romantic friendships (built from two-way self-authenticity) as chances to further stir both parties to *truly be themselves*. That is to say, symbiotically putting forth their ‘real’ selves creates a nourishing bond over time that, in effect, gives additional encouragement for each person to sustain / improve self-authenticity within the relationship. Dan expresses this shared experience most succinctly:

*Honestly, I think we’ve ... cultivated this habit ... [off] sticking true to each other ... Way I see it, I think it’s a good habit ... [to help me] be used to ... saying what I’m actually thinking ... I do it much better now ... [and] more often ... It’s less of a struggle.* (Dan) [emphasis highlights how mutual authenticity maintains / inspires more ‘real’ selfhood expressions]

Interviewees’ friendly commonalities / groupings nurture their perceptions of becoming *closer* with partners. As Spiegelberg (1973, p. 142) hints at, closeness here is not about literal physical distance. Instead, what interviewees are trying to express relates to their process of *understanding, and being ‘really’ understood by, beloveds’ ‘true’ selves*. This emergent closeness is thus imaginative, entailing their impressions of moving figuratively ‘nearer’ to knowing befriended partners for ‘who they actually are’ inside – and vice-versa.87

*I reckon, like, we’re close … like, the thing is, he knows the real me ... I know him well, most times … There’s like – we know each other inside out … [and] don’t need to pretend and stuff like that, ya know?* (Fiona)

*I, um – I feel really close to him … It’s nice … [to] have a friend in a partner … who I feel – he really gets me … I’d say, um – I do the same … as in, I genuinely understand him, too.* (Rachel) [emphasis alludes to closeness derived from shared apprehensions of ‘real’ identities]

87 This experiential theme is tightly intertwined with ‘emotional attraction’, to be covered in the next chapter. Additionally, for interviewees, becoming self-authentically ‘closer’ with partners also leads to ‘trust’ (see Brown 2009), ‘compassion’ (see Berry et al. 2010), and ‘joy’ (see Meadows 1975), amongst other labelled experiences they refer to. Each of these are complex phenomena in their own right – a detailed analysis of which I have decided to exclude from the restricted purview of my thesis. Readers are welcomed to refer to the above authors for relevant, albeit ideographically different, phenomenological explorations.
I have thus far discussed some (not all) of the experiential themes that appear to shape interviewees’ romantic friendships vis-à-vis their ‘ideal’ perceptions of ‘being in love’. I will now explore a few possible image schemas subtending their embodied meanings.

8.2. Image Schemas of Friendship

MATCHING (Johnson 1987, p. 126) is a key experiential structure of our embodied existences. Johnson himself posits no formal definitions for this image schema, despite listing it. Nonetheless, from exposures to his and other authors’ works, I suggest this basic pattern centres on our bodily abilities in identifying and comparing salient quantitative / qualitative features between various objects for degrees / aspects of similarity. This sensorially-based process of comparison may occur in an immediate sense between two or more external items or, alternatively, involve cognitive memory (e.g. recalling previously experienced objects for parallels with other mentally stored items and / or presently perceived ones). To this end, I contend the MATCHING image schema is in fact pivotal to how we “classify perceived objects as familiar or unfamiliar” (Lamberts, Brockdorff & Heit 2002, p. 1176), giving birth to our aptitudes for recognition (see Rookes & Wilson 2000, p. 60).

Here, I argue interviewees’ propositional references to commonality are implicitly reliant on MATCHING. In this specific context, rather than finding literal semblances between concrete objects, interviewees seem to latently engage with creative extensions of this schema that, in effect, enables them to conceive of having MATCHING interpersonal similarities with partners. At first glance, these extensions seem very abstract, pertaining mostly to their qualitative comparisons between selfhoods and their recognitions of non-material characteristics. However, the following responses reveal interviewees’ quiet, albeit crucial, imaginative dependencies on this embodied logic – without which any notions of commonality (and entailing feelings of similarity) would all but lose their present meanings:

We’ve many same interests … We’re very alike … I think – honestly, we’re a good match. (Dan)

88 Refer to Brower 2000 and Hurtienne, Weber & Blessing 2008 for examples of past references to the MATCHING schema.

89 ‘Objects’ are not limited to visual items alone, but may also pertain to comparisons of touch (e.g. textures), smell (e.g. aromas), taste (e.g. flavours), and sound (e.g. pitch).
I reckon we got, like, this super similar low-brow humour and all … [that] most people – they’ll find us stupid! (Fiona)

Mate, we’re much the same … [when] we’re wantin’ to … knock heads with someone. (Ben)

I feel we’re really twin flames … I’d say, um – we’re mostly on the same wavelength in life. (Rachel) [emphasis on MATCHING-based propositions]

Many aspects of interviewees’ groupings are also experientially steeped in schematic reasoning. To begin with, their meaning-laden perceptions of bonding or unifying with partners signify activations of LINK (Johnson 1987, p. 113). This recurring pattern centres on people’s bodily perceptions of “two or more entities which are connected with each other by means of a linking device of some kind” (Santibáñez 2002, p. 188). Like all image schemas, this basic embodied logic is metaphorically extended to create many identity-giving inferences, including “our construal of social relationships … [that allow us to] speak of such things as having connections, breaking social ties, and the bonds of slavery” (Santibáñez 2002, p. 188; see Johnson 1987, p. 117; Lakoff 1987, p. 274). Reconciled with our current discussion, I suggest the connecting ‘entities’ here pertain to interviewees’ imaginings of two distinctly CONTAINED selfhoods (their own and partners) that become figuratively conjoined via the relational LINKING ‘device’ of conceptual ‘friendship’ (to be further discussed in the next section). Again, any abstract meanings of this sort are intimately thriven from their tacit learnings of this schematic structure, as implied below:

I think, way back … before we got together … she and I just connected, as friends. (Dan)

We stuck together … just [as] friends at first … I reckon – back in Year Three, Uni. (Fiona)

Ain’t nothin’ tore our friendship apart yet. (Ben)

I really feel – um, any good couple … it’s good to at least be friends before anything … That bond needs to be there. (Rachel) [emphasis highlights LINK-dependent reasonings]

In addition, interviewees’ tendencies to differentiate their inclusive two-person groupings from excluded others are, in essence, CONTAINER activated experiences.

Stacy’s [Sarah’s best friend] always tryin’ to get in our space … I tell her, “Know your boundaries!” … Don’t stir shit in our relationship … our friendship … [that] she ain’t involved in. (Ben)

Like, on the outside … people think we’re weird, ya know? … We talk lotsa … bad trash [to each other] … lotsa inside jokes and all that … [that] only we’re in on. (Fiona) [emphasis on CONTAINER inferences]
PART-WHOLE (Johnson 1987, p. 126; Lakoff 1987, p. 273) is another image schema that meaningfully organises (and constrains) interviewees’ impressions of grouping. Structurally consisting of “a WHOLE, PARTS, and a CONFIGURATION” (Lakoff 1987, p. 273), this image schema fills our embodied existences in such ways as:

Our entire lives are spent with an awareness of both our wholeness and our parts. We experience our bodies as WHOLEs with PARTs. In order to get around in the world, we have to be aware of the PART-WHOLE structure of other objects. In fact, we have evolved so that our basic-level perception can distinguish the fundamental PART-WHOLE structure that we need in order to function in our physical environment. (Lakoff 1987, p. 273)

As discussed before, interviewees see their romantic friendships as a dyadic way of relating to (rather than being secluded from) other people, activities, values, etc. In my opinion, this specific type of relatedness is hinged on a metaphorical extension of PART-WHOLE that allows them to grasp their CONFIGURATED ‘groupings’ as PARTs that engage with a WHOLE possibility of life-world experiences.

We’re so proud … to be part of this bigger, growing [vegan] movement … Honestly, I think, yeah – we changed our lifestyles … we’re eating healthier … trying to do our part to spread the wider message. (Dan)

Me and Steve – we do … heaps of community work … I guess, um – as partners, we really like feeling like … we belong to our community, in some sense. (Rachel) [emphasis on PART-WHOLE embodied logic]

Interviewees’ desires for self-authentic groupings appear to be made up of several overlaying schematic elaborations. First, they unconsciously rely on the PERSON IS A CONTAINER metaphor amidst pursuits to MATCH their internal ‘real’ identities with external appearances. At the same time, BALANCE – which Johnson says offers “key threads that holds our physical experience together” (1987, p. 74)90 – informs their hopes for partners to mutually commit to self-authentic expressions with approximately equivalent measure. Meanwhile, NEAR-FAR – a spatially-orienting

---

90 To elaborate, BALANCE is an image schema that people naturally learn of through their bodies – most particularly during the earliest years when “the baby stands, wobbles, and drops to the floor … tries again … until a new world opens up – the world of the balanced erect posture” (Johnson 1987, p. 74). In most instances, BALANCE recedes into the background of our attention, yet quickly rises again to active consciousness when a sudden or unwanted loss of body EQUILIBRIUM is experienced – for example, “when there is too much acid, the hands are too cold, the head is too hot, the bladder is distended, the sinuses are swollen, the mouth is dry” (Johnson 1987, p. 75). Amidst these types of instances, a person is naturally compelled to take measures to adjust his / her corporeal conditions and/or orientations “until balance is set right again” (Johnson 1987, p. 75). Beyond these immediate perceptions, BALANCE also nourishes many abstract realms of human understanding, including those associated with “psychological states, legal relationships, formal systems, and so forth” (Johnson 1987, p. 80).
schema “stretching along our perceptual or conceptual perspective” (Johnson 1987, p. 125)\textsuperscript{91} – lends intelligible form to the existential closeness they feel amidst a ‘true’ sharing of both parties.

I gotta *match* what I say … [with] what’s goin’ on inside … else I’m ain’t different from ‘em fakers, mate. (Ben) [emphasis on MATCHING / CONTAINER-inspired self-authenticity]

I think we’re … *equally* committed … [to] being honest and being ourselves to each other … I wouldn’t think it’s right if – well, I dunno, if say … I’m honest and she wasn’t … it wouldn’t be fair … wouldn’t balance out. (Dan) [emphasis on mutual self-authenticity as BALANCE]

[When] he’s, like, pouring his heart out … reaching out … [and] I’m doing the same … I reckon, like … it helps me feel *closer* to him. (Fiona) [emphasis on NEAR-FAR structures of closeness]

There are of course myriad other schematic possibilities I am unable to discuss here. Regardless, what is covered illustrates the deeply schematic nature of interviewees’ romantic friendships vis-à-vis ‘being in love’ – embodied meanings and experiences that purely constructionist accounts are likely to overlook.

8.3. Cultural Meaning-Templates of Friendship

A diversity of ideals and behaviours perpetuate people’s general conceptions of ‘friendship’ across different cultures (Brandt & Heuser 2011, p. 146; Hruschka 2010, p. 3). In most Western cultures, friendship is seen as the fruit of social life; a voluntary relation “frequently heralded as nothing less than the defining relationship of our age” (Vernon 2005, p. 1). Such connections intertwine with modernist notions of selfhood and homophily from which “people have to create their friendships mostly out of who they are, their interests and needs” (Vernon 2005, p. 4). Having friends has also become “an indication of social integration and a requirement of both physical and mental health as well as a source of happiness” (Caine 2014b, p. ix) – to which “a life without them [is] one of the bleakest prospects that most people could imagine” (Peel, Reed & Walter 2014, p. 319).\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{91} Johnson does not detail the specifics of this image schema. However, he does see NEAR-FAR as intimately related to CENTRE-PERIPHERY (Johnson 1987, p. 125), which I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 10.

\textsuperscript{92} Yet, despite its centrality, it is somewhat ironic that the precise meaning of ‘friendship’ remains hard to define, both in layman and social scientific terms (see Caine 2014b, p. xiii; McGuire 2010, p. xi; Spencer & Pahl 2006, p. ix). Put simply, “it seems that it is not possible to say unequivocally what friendship is” (Vernon 2005, p. 5) even as people continue to regard their friends as assets to leading fulfilling lives.
This lauded Western cultural view of friendship has a long evolutionary history. For example, Baltzly & Eliopoulos highlight how “friendship is one of the most pervasive themes in the writing that have come down from the ancient Greeks” (2014, p. 2) – the word ‘friendship’ itself derived from the Greek term *philia*. Amongst many Greek philosophers who saw this relationship as a virtuous pursuit, it is Epicurus, Socrates, Plato, and especially Aristotle’s extensive albeit differing classical treatments of *philia* which laid the fertile soil for ideological modifications across many epochs (Baltzly & Eliopoulos 2014). Such modifications include (but are not limited to) proliferated ideals by the Roman statesman Cicero (Mews 2014), thinkers of the Medieval and Renaissance periods (James & Kent 2014), Enlightenment writers propelling the cultural shift from dominant Christian beliefs to secular sentimentalities (Garrioch 2014), and the authorial productivity of women during the late 18th and 19th centuries (Caine 2014c). Whether via approval or opposition, these and other vast social movements have all contributed in some way or another to current vernacular ideals of friendship. More recently, it was the arrival of 20th century modernity that led to the most dramatic transformation of classical, avant-garde, and patriarchal meanings of friendship into more universally assessible “[biographical] conversation[s] about who you had been, who you were and who you wanted to be” (Peel 2014, p. 280). During this period, “cultural descriptions and prescriptions also focused on the links between friendship and successful selfhood … [where it is] your friends, more than anyone, [who] witnessed and assisted you [in] develop[ing] a true sense of self” (Peel 2014, p. 280). Friendship thus evolved to be seen as an existential opportunity to engage in authentic interactions equally created by “relatively autonomous and mobile individuals who … [have] the right to pursue choices” (Peel 2014, p. 282). This notion of a self-developing, freely-chosen, and mutual kind of relationship has mostly carried over into the 21st century (Peel, Reed & Walter 2014).

I posit interviewees’ likely lifelong exposures to the above cultural meaning-template have, on an implicit level, partly influenced *how they approach their friendly relations with partners*. To be clear, they do not view their romantic friendships in quite the same way as other platonic relations they may have. This is arguably due to the interfusing presence of other super-ordinate themes, especially ‘attraction’ (to be discussed). However, a few features of their experiences do seem to

---

93 Refer to Caine (ed. 2014a), Hruschika (2010), King & Devere (eds 2012), McGuire (2010), and Vernon (2010) for more detailed historical accounts of Western friendships.

94 The original Greek understanding of *philia* included a far broader range of relationships (including family and acquaintances) than what most Western persons today understand friendship to be (Baltzly & Eliopoulos 2014, p. 2).
closely parallel friendship as a handed-down ideal. For instance, all interviewees seek commonality with beloveds – an agenda that echoes Vernon’s (2005, p. 4) point on friendships being culturally framed as self-identified pursuits of common interests / needs.\textsuperscript{95} Based on previous quotes, readers can also recall how interviewees tend to see grouping as an accumulated outcome of both their own and partners’ distinct self-experiences. Again, these imaginings align with sedimented historical norms that, as Peel (2014, p. 280) states, position friendship as intimate biographical dialogues amongst unique persons. Romantic friendships are moreover felt by them to be voluntary in nature – once more hinting at subtle influences of the broader Western concept of befriending as a highly autonomous activity (Peel 2014, p. 282).

Interviewees’ taken-for-granted inclusions of friendship as a key aspect of ‘being in love’ resonate with another salient trend of Western cultures – namely, the proliferated conflation of both categorical experiences. Peel, Reed & Walter suggest a flood of cultural texts beginning in the late 20\textsuperscript{th} century (and still propagated today) have made it increasingly “difficult to conceive of lasting and intimate relationships that lacked friendliness and the kinds of emotional support associated with friends” (2014, p. 318). As they elaborate:

\begin{quote}
The relationship between friendship and [romantic] love is a particularly important feature of later twentieth-century lives … Friendship was increasingly seen to sustain and deepen romantic love; it was the mature reflection that followed the rush of attraction … In the shorter bursts of television shows, and especially in the songs that formed an increasingly common backdrop of lived experience, the best lovers and partners were those with whom you enjoyed what you also shared with friends: common interests and passions, in particular … To become friends and to remain friends was an ever-more important part of successful romantic and sexual relationships. (Peel, Reed & Walter 2014, p. 326)
\end{quote}

These culturally patterned mergers of friendship with romantic love appear to manifest strongly amidst interviewees’ responses – seen at the start of this chapter and also here:

I don’t think I’d ever say … I loved someone … if I wasn’t at least friends with her … It’d be quite weird, honestly. (Dan)

I reckon I see Jack as, like – he’s my lover and a friend, ya know? (Fiona)

Mate, she ain’t a friend friend … [but] she’s still bein’ a friend to me, know what I mean? (Ben)

I feel, um – our friendship’s definitely still there … I’d say, it’s definitely a huge sense of … why I still love him. (Rachel)

\textsuperscript{95} Empirical studies (e.g. Ellis & Zarbatany 2007; Roberts-Griffin 2011; Youyou et al. 2017) further verify commonality as a prevalent culturally-defined ideal of most Western person’s romantic and platonic friendships.
The widespread cultural meaning-template of ‘self-authenticity’ seems just as relevant. Exploring its complex Western history, Taylor explains:

An ethics of authenticity is something relatively new and peculiar to modern culture. Born at the end of the eighteenth century, it builds on earlier forms of individualism, such as the individualism of disengaged rationality, pioneered by Descartes, where the demand is that each person thinks self-responsibly for him – or herself, or the political individualism of Locke, which sought to make the person and his or her will prior to social obligation. But authenticity also has been in some respects in conflict with these earlier forms. It is a child of the Romantic period [particularly, Rousseau’s influence], which was critical of disengaged rationality and of an atomism that didn’t recognize the ties of community … [There is also the influence of] Herder [who] put forward the idea that each of us has an original way of being human … This idea has entered very deep into modern consciousness. (1991, p. 25; see eds Vannini & Williams 2016)

According to Taylor, all of these entwining notions have, throughout the ages, created a “powerful moral ideal that has come down to us” (1991, p. 29). This ideal instills the popular belief that “there is a certain way of being human that is my way … [from which] being true to myself means being true to my own originality” (Taylor 1991, p. 29). However, the modern cultural path to being ‘true to oneself’ is not purely monological; instead, “relationships are seen as the key loci of self-discovery and self-confirmation” (Taylor 1991, p. 49). Importantly, Taylor postulates bonds forged through romantic love are most frequently touted as prime “crucibles of inwardly generated ability” (1991, p. 49).

These residual ways of thinking seem to have an unconscious partial bearing on interviewees’ desires for partners and themselves to invest (and further emerge as) ‘who they really are’ amidst romantic friendships. Ben and Rachel’s descriptions, along with earlier responses, give impetus to this tentative claim:

If I ain’t free bein’ myself … [or] if she ain’t really herself … what’s the fuckin’ point, mate? … We’re always … keepin’ it proper real to each other … She challenges me … to see shit about who I really am … [that] I ain’t seein’ on my own … I ain’t afraid to do the same for her … It’s the whole deal. (Ben)

I really feel, um – I’d say, we really help each other stay true … [to] who we truly are … our dreams … our true beliefs … our principles … I’d say, we encourage each other … in all that. (Rachel)

In sum, my examination of the above cultural meaning-templates (out of many others not discussed) reveals how interviewees’ romantic friendships are not conceived asocially. Rather,

---

96 Also see Lindholm (2008) and Vannini & Williams (eds 2016) for their respective historical accounts on authenticity in Western cultures.
channeling Johnson, the various experiential strands that shape such convivial bonds are at least partly indebted to environmental influences that work in organic communion with their biographical and schematic groundings.

8.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored ‘friendship’ as a defining part of interviewees’ ‘ideal’ moments of ‘being in love’. As interpreted, this super-ordinate theme is largely composed of interweaving ‘commonality’ and ‘grouping’. Commonality relates to interviewees’ ongoing wishes to discover, nurture, and sustain shared interests, values, goals, and other self-defining qualities with partners. This often leads to interpersonal ‘similarity’, voluntarily felt from a long-term likening of mindsets (via what they perceive to be mostly matching personal qualities and / or mutual intentions to better understand each other). Concurrently, grouping involves interviewees’ senses of non-literally bonding with beloveds. Such experiences are construed through 1) imaginative formations of dyadically oriented we-unions, 2) creatively differentiating between inclusive romantic friendships and excluded others, 3) seeing such bonds as meaningfully related, instead of separated from, other spheres of life, 4) valuing these connections as co-created outcomes of two persons’ distinct identities, and 5) idealising romantic friendships as being stronger, deeper, and more lasting than most platonic relations. Commonality and grouping are also driven by interviewees’ desires to be ‘self-authentic’ – both to themselves and their perceptions of beloveds’ equal motives to be ‘who they are’. This forms a union that, to them, maintains / further inspires ‘true’ selfhood expressions. Through these collective qualities, interviewees develop an increasing sense of becoming existentially ‘closer’ to their partners, hallmarked by a ‘real’ grasping of each other’s unique individualities. As per Johnson’s approach, all these experiential themes and their entailing meanings are nourished via an irreducible holism of biographical, schematic, and cultural influences.

I now turn to discussing interviewees’ experiences of ‘attraction’ – a major super-ordinate theme that, alongside self-growth and friendship, helps nourish their optimal moments of ‘being in love’.
9. Attraction

“… the law of Attraction is another name for love. This is an eternal and fundamental principle, inherent in all things – in every system of philosophy, in every religion, and in every science.”
(Haanel 2008, p. 100)

Self-growth and friendship paint only a partial picture of interviewees’ ‘ideal’ experiences of ‘being in love’. For them, ‘attraction’ is just as important. Rachel is clear on this:

We’re really attracted to each other … I’d say, um – I feel that’s really very important … with love … I feel it’s really weird, as in – um, if I wasn’t attracted to Steve … I wouldn’t call it love, right?

Dan, Fiona, and Ben think the same, offering their own elaborations:

I’m honestly drawn to Jane … She’s attractive … I think, honestly – our attraction’s one reason why … we fell in love … [and why] we’re still in love. (Dan)

Ya know, I reckon, like – Jack’s still attractive, ya know? … I reckon, I love him … [because] he knows he pulls me in … [with] how he is. (Fiona)

Our spark’s flyin’ most days, mate … She’s a magnet … We’re proper attracted. (Ben)

In short, I interpret this shared quality of ‘being in love’ centers on interviewees impressions of being ‘drawn towards’ their partners. These gravitations are primarily made up of two interfusing aspects – namely, ‘physical’ and ‘emotional attraction. I will now describe their respective experiential, schematic, and cultural dimensions.

9.1. Experiential Themes of Physical and Emotional Attraction

In simplest terms, interviewees’ physical attractions relate to their feelings of being ‘pulled in’ by beloveds’ corporealties. Such movements are at times literal, as in the case when Rachel gets the urge to “cuddle up closer with Steve” or when Ben “can’t help touchin’ Sarah”. However, for the
most part, this thematic experience is a *figurative occurrence* that entails interviewees’ habits of moving or ‘*shifting*’ their conscious attentions to focus in on partners’ bodily appearances.97

Honestly, I think there’s times I just catch myself … just *staring at her* … *She’s attractive* … *[in] the way she looks* … She’s beautiful. (Dan)

He’s a bit older now … *[but] I reckon, like, ya know – *I look at him* … *[and] I still think he’s eye candy* … He’s not ugly and all that … *He’s still physically attractive*. (Fiona) [emphasis on cognitive focus on partners’ attractive physicalities]

Physical attraction blossoms via two evaluative methods, each taking place at varying moments and to differing degrees. The first method is predicated on interviewees ‘*holistic*’ appreciations of partners’ *overall* physical presentations – sans attention to specific body parts or nuances. Ben and Rachel’s responses encompass this observation:

> Aw, too hard to say, mate … *She’s [physically] hot, as is … Ain’t one thing or another … She’s all round … lookin’ proper attractive*. (Ben)

> I feel, well – um, I’d say, it’s really *not down to anything specific … on how he looks? … I’d say, he’s [physically] attractive … As in, he’s an overall attractive man*. (Rachel) [emphasis on holistic physical attraction]

Holistic physical attraction is at once perceptually *ambiguous and determinative*. It is ambiguous insofar as interviewees are at times unwilling98 and / or unable to attribute partners’ bodily appeals to any one particular feature (e.g. eyes, face, weight, etc.). However, at the same time, it is *precisely* this ambiguity that compels them to *determinatively* affirm beloveds’ general appearances as ‘more attractive than the sum of their physical parts’. Dan explains:

> The way I see it, I dunno … I’ve *always found her just [physically] attractive on the whole, just in general* … Honestly – it’s *not just her eyes … [or] her smile* – I dunno … *She’s more attractive than just those* … *It’s everything, all of her* … *[and] how she presents herself*. (Dan) [emphasis on at once ambiguous / determinative aspects of holistic physical attraction]

A second evaluative method centers on other occasions where interviewees are more readily inclined to hone in on *specific* traits of partners’ physical attractiveness. These traits include a wide

---

97 These focusing acts are sometimes accompanied by the aforementioned literal bodily movements – but not always.
98 This is arguably due to interviewees’ desires to avoid overtly ‘sexually objectifying’ their partners (to be discussed further).
range of subtle features, mannerisms, postures, and other corporeal ‘parts’ that make up beloveds’
general bodily aesthetics.\textsuperscript{99}

I think she’s especially [physically] attractive … [when] she’s lost in the zone … [and] she’s
hyper-focused … I love it … [when] she’s giving that face. (Dan)

Jack’s a gym rat … He works out, like, I reckon - maybe three, four days a week … I can’t stand
it … [when] guys get too-buff and stuff like that, ya know? … [But] I reckon his new muscles –
they’re kinda sexy, I admit … I like them! (Fiona)

It’s tits for me, mate – love ‘em … Sarah’s got huge tits … Ain’t shy to say I’m always oglin’
… [They’re] one of her [physical] assets. (Ben)

Steve’s tall – I mean, he’s really very tall … I find … his height pretty [physically] attractive.
(Rachel) [emphasis on specific physical attraction]

Whilst outwardly contradictory\textsuperscript{100}, I suggest interviewees’ holistic and specific appraisals of
beloveds’ appearances are both significant to reifying their physical attractions vis-à-vis ‘being in
love’.\textsuperscript{101} Rachel expresses this point, albeit indirectly:

I feel, um – there’s really … heaps of things making him [physically] attractive? … He takes
care of his appearance … He wears nice clothes … keeps his beard … [But] I feel, um – I’d say,
I’m really, um – I’m not fussed, not too particular … [because] he’s already [physically]
attractive to me overall – as in, without all that … I mean, um – of course, I’d say, looks ...
really do matter … a little bit with love. (Rachel) [emphasis on both holistic / specific physical
attractions in relation to ‘being in love’]

Interviewees physical attractions are not simply limited to visual stimuli. Instead, such experiences
are highly multisensorial, including other compositing aspects of touch, smell, sound, and even
taste. For instance, Fiona divulges how Jack’s “hugs and kisses” are appealing to her because of
“his arms … his cologne … [his] voice in my ear … [and] how his lips taste” – with all these
perceptions contributing to his physical attractiveness. Other interviewees recount similar
sensorially-rich appreciations:

\textsuperscript{99} Partners’ specific physical traits may become particularly alluring to interviewees due to their referential meanings
beyond immediate contexts. For example, Ben recalls how Sarah once flashed him a “secret … fiendish smile” amidst
an outing with friends. This soon led to “hard sex … [when] we got back home”. He now recognises this hinting look
(via past references) as a nuanced aspect of her physical attractiveness.

\textsuperscript{100} At first glance, it seems inconsistent for interviewees to partake in both these evaluative methods (e.g. their frequent
refrains from reducing partners’ allures to specific body parts – yet, on other occasions, doing just that). However, I
stress these facets of physical attraction are highly imaginative, experientially fluid, and / or contextualised to wide-
spanning discussions – and thus, do not adhere to strict logical rules.

\textsuperscript{101} In general, Dan and Rachel tend to speak of their physical attractions in more holistic ways whilst Fiona and Ben
are often far more specific. Regardless, all interviewees show propensities to partake in both evaluative methods in
some form or another.
I love *hearing* her talk … She’s an attractive *voice* – a gentle way of speaking … Sometimes she *touche* my neck … [in] this sensual way … [that] feels great. (Dan)

She ain’t shy … *usin’* lotsa *tongue*, mate … Lots of *moanin’*, too … It’s proper sexy! (Ben)

We, um – we’ve done long-distance before … [but] I feel, um – the Internet’s really – it’s not quite the same? … I’d say, I mean – I feel our attraction’s stronger … when we see each other in person … [and] we can *touch* … [and] hold each other, in real life. (Rachel) [emphasis on multisensorial physical attraction]

Physical attraction is spurred by somewhat paradoxical, albeit equally formative, beliefs. On one hand, each interviewee sees his / her gravitations towards partners as a *naturally unfolding event* – something that *involuntarily* “just kinda happened” (Fiona) without “needin’ to think too much” (Ben). Yet, they also regularly stress their freedoms in *voluntarily choosing to indulge in partners’ bodily allure*. Ben’s remarks capture this unique experiential blend of instinct / decision-making:

> Our [physical] attraction … *ain’t somethin’ we could help*, mate … I’m *naturally* … *wantin’ her* … Ain’t somethin’ I can explain … I got my fair slab of women, mate … [but] *I’m pickin’ our attraction* … [over] any of ‘em … no FOMO [i.e. slang for ‘fear of missing out’]. (Ben) [emphasis highlights involuntary / voluntary nature of physical attraction]

Interviewees’ physical attractions are lived out in concurrently ‘subjective’ and ‘subjectively objective’ ways. I use the first term to refer to their tendencies to see partners’ bodily appeals as a matter of their own *personal tastes* – not necessarily agreeable with others’. In other words, beloveds’ physicalities are ‘subjectively’ appealing to them based on their envisages of having unique biographical preferences for certain looks, demeanors, etc. For example, Fiona explains how Jack’s physical attractiveness is “what I’m into … [but] not everyone will like”:

> I reckon, like – I’ve always preferred … dark-skinned guys, exotic guys … [and] *Jack fits my taste* … My girl-friends – like, ya know, they don’t all think he’s attractive … [but] I do … *Physical attraction’s so subjective*, ya know? … Lotsa people have their own definitions and stuff … I reckon, like, that’s okay – I’ve *my own preference* … *To me – I reckon Jack’s attractive*. (Fiona) [emphasis highlights subjective physical attraction]

---

102 Although all five senses are important to physical attraction, interviewees do seem to vary in their perceptual preferences. For instance, apart from sight, Ben tends to focus heavily on touch, with Fiona homing in on more aural pleasures with her partner.

103 As with holistic / specific evaluations, these imaginative beliefs are not limited by dichotomous either / or reasoning.
At the very same time, interviewees also maintain ‘subjectively objective’ discernments of partners’ corporeal allures. This shorthand centers on their largely taken-for-granted penchant for comparing their subjective physical attractions to what they imagine to be ‘objective’ or collective societal ideals of ‘what physical attractiveness is’. To be clear, this does not mean interviewees see themselves as outright ‘giving in’ to these so-called wider standards – only that their personal gauges of beloveds’ physicalities often implicitly unfold in meaningful relation to them. Ben and Rachel’s descriptions illustrate:

Most folks ain’t into fat chicks, mate … I ain’t into ’em either … Sarah ain’t fat … She’s slender sexy … These days girls – they keep cuttin’ their hair short … Not my business what they wanna do with their hair, mate … [but] I ain’t into it myself … I’m likin’ how Sarah’s keepin’ her hair long. (Ben)

I’d say, um – some would say … Steve’s a little nerdy, I guess? … So, I mean, um – I guess, he doesn’t go with … the typical Alpha Male, sporty image … I feel, well, um – I’m really not keen … [on] wannabe-macho men anyway … I really prefer … Steve’s nerdy look. (Rachel)

Physical attraction is often (but not always) steeped in eroticism – a multifaceted phenomenon in its own right. Within this current context, I propose interviewees’ erotic feelings are mostly composed of two interweaving experiential themes – namely, ‘symbolisation’ and ‘sexual tension’. Symbolisation pertains to their imaginative transformations of partners’ bodily traits into cognitive representations of past and / or future sexual desires. That is to say, interviewees’ perceptions of beloveds’ physically attractive features are not fully experienced in the immediate present, but rather, come to symbolise their memories / anticipations of various corporeal pleasures (including, but not limited to, sex).

There’s times … we’re making out … [and] I start to remember … how crazy … we were in Thailand … I think, yeah, honestly, we were … pretty much all over each other on that trip … I think – I admit, I feel quite excited … when I’m [physically] with her … [and] remember how hedonistic we were. (Dan)

---

104 These habits are taken-for-granted insofar as interviewees consciously regard their physical attractions as subjective – even as, in my opinion, subjectively objective processes of meaning-making still discreetly take place.

105 Interviewees simultaneously recognise people’s abilities to have their own subjective (i.e. personal) bodily tastes amidst broader ‘objective’ (i.e. collective) standards of physical attractiveness.

106 Whether interviewees’ tastes ‘actually’ adhere to Western cultural ideals of physical attractiveness is not my analytical prerogative. Instead, the key emphasis here is their everyday impressions of what these standards supposedly are, and how they implicitly make sense of their own subjective views vis-à-vis such perceptions.

107 There are of course many occasions where interviewees’ physical attractions appear less erotic. For example, Dan’s general praises of Jane’s “lovely [facial] features” do not seem overly motivated by symbolisations and / or sexual tension (at least, not in obvious ways).

108 This observation partly relates back to Footnote 99.
I reckon, like, ya know – if I happen to … look down at his pants, like, casually or something … sometimes … my thoughts … creep in … [and] I’m actually … daydreaming about sex and stuff like that. (laughs) (Fiona) [emphasis implies erotic symbolisation]

Meanwhile, sexual tension hinges on interviewees’ erotic symbolisations that – if felt to be reciprocated by partners\textsuperscript{109} – foster their impressions of building towards physical release.\textsuperscript{110} It is important to stress that the appeal of such experiences occasionally lies with the build itself, not always the outcome. In this sense, tension is enjoyed by them as a processual and accumulative state in both cognitive (i.e. as ongoing imagination seems to get ‘closer’ to bodily reality) and physical ways (i.e. biological arousals). Ben offers the most direct example:

Our tension’s off the charts, mate! … We’d be teasin’ each other … back and forth, the whole fuckin’ day … Two of us – we’re thinkin’ the same thing … [and] I’m feelin’ myself gettin’ … more and more riled up … waitin’ to get it on … [when] we’re alone … Meantime I’m goin’ crazy … waitin’ for the payoff, know what I’m saying? (Ben) [emphasis on reciprocal / processual / accumulative qualities of sexual tension]\textsuperscript{111}

Eroticism does not seem to entail unbridled ‘sexual objectification’. Schmidt & Kistemaker define this as “the separation of the body, body parts, or body functions from an individual’s personality” (2015, p. 77). However, amidst ‘being in love’, I contend interviewees are far more oriented towards ‘sexual subjectification’. I adapt this term to refer to their routines of eroticising partners’ physicalities to better appreciate – not marginalise – the latter’s distinct personal identities.\textsuperscript{112} Put in slightly different terms, interviewees are wont to see physical attraction as a mere ‘part’ of grasping beloveds’ rich existential ‘wholes’.

| \hline
| I think, honestly, the way I see it – our physical attraction … goes hand in hand … [with] loving her mind … loving her body, loving her soul … [and] everything … [that] defines her … I honestly – I don’t think our [physical] attraction’s … just blind lust … or mindless passion. (Dan) |
| \hline
| Well, um, like I said … I really feel it’s odd … [to] say I’m in love … [and] not want intimacy? … I mean, er – I’d say, the sex and … [physical] attraction – it’s me … accepting … [and] |
| \hline

\textsuperscript{109} See Chapter 11 for more on this super-ordinate theme.
\textsuperscript{110} ‘Release’ here may at times involve actual biological orgasms via intercourse, but can also include the fulfilment of other bodily pleasures not directly pertaining to sexual intercourse (e.g. hugging, kissing, etc.).
\textsuperscript{111} Interviewees differ in how they describe sexual tension. For instance, Rachel is less explicit compared to Ben, subtly describing it as an “electric, intimate feeling”. Still, despite expressive variations, each of them is clear in conveying this experiential theme to some extent or another.
\textsuperscript{112} Of course, interviewees do focus on partners’ bodily aspects, although with seemingly less reductive intentions than blatant sexual objectification. In addition, sexual subjectification (as I have described it) appears to be tightly linked with emotional attraction, which I will soon cover.
embracing all of him, our whole relationship … It really makes me feel … we’re more complete … not missing something. (Rachel) [emphasis on sexual subjectification]

Interviewees’ current physical attractions are experientially shaped by their long-term desires to remain intimate with partners. This includes the hopeful sustenance of sex, kissing, hugging, hand-holding, and/or many other bodily interactions.

Yeah, like – I reckon, of course I’d want us ... to stay intimate, ya know? … I reckon, like, we’re [physically] attracted to each other now … [and] I hope that’s not gonna change … [and] we’ll still desire ... each other ... same as now. (Fiona)

Mate, we’re fucked … [if] one day we ain’t [physically] keen [on each other], like some dried prunes … I’m prayin’ we never go down that road … [and] keep stokin’ our [physical] fires. (Ben) [emphasis on wishes for lasting bodily intimacies]

Physical attraction comes with growing feelings of familiarity – specifically, interviewees’ increasing multisensorial recognitions of partners’ bodies. These recognitions are often value-added insofar as they may feed into various other experiences, including acquainted physical routines (e.g. favourite sex positions, ways of touching, approach to kissing, etc.) and heightened eroticisms (e.g. exploring fresh bodily fetishes, new methods for building sexual tension, etc.).

Most importantly, interviewees suggest familiarity to be a crucial ingredient to fulfilling the above-mentioned prospect for enduring physical attraction. Dan captures the essence of this theme:

I honestly think – yeah, the longer we’re intimate … we’ll just be more used to … the physical stuff we like ... what we don’t like ... [and also] just start feeling more comfortable ... [to] try new things … The way I see it – I think … being familiar with each other in that way … helps us stay [physically] intimate, for the long run. (Dan) [emphasis on aspects of familiarity]

---

113 Sexual subjectification also helps interviewees separate physical attraction amidst ‘being in love’ from many common forms of erotic activity. For example, Fiona was once ‘drawn in’ by the bodily appearances of some men she knew in the past, including “old flings … hook-ups … [and] maybe some one-night-stands”. However, she confesses to “never bother[ing] … [to] know them too well” due to her half-hearted interest in their personalities. By contrast, Fiona’s sexual subjectification of Jack compels her to appreciate his identity in a fuller light compared to most previous physically attractive persons in her life (with the possible exceptions of ex-boyfriends whom she used to – but no longer – care for).

114 As explained at the start of Part B, interviewees’ past, present, and future-oriented experiences (in this case, their aims to preserve physical attraction) are all mutually elaborative, involving ‘temporally transcending’ processes of meaning-making.

115 On a pragmatic level, interviewees believe such expressions are bound to diminish within certain contexts (e.g. arguments, busy work periods, personal distractions, etc.). Nonetheless, when it comes to ‘being in love’, they stress that physical attraction towards partners should always feel present to some degree or another – never completely extinguished (see Chapter 12 for more).


117 However, interviewees anticipate any prolonged lack of these kinds of activities in the future could potentially (but not definitely) cause what I interpret to be a Heideggerian sense of ‘situational boredom’ (Svendsen 2005, p. 119) – to which physical attraction may no longer seem to offer any new intimate experiences. This might further lead to ‘unideal’ moments of ‘being in love’, to be explored in Chapter 12.
Like physical attraction, interviewees’ emotional attractions also entail their feelings of being ‘pulled in’ by beloveds. However, this style of attraction is not directly about the allure of bodily features. Rather, it describes their imaginative self-perceptions of non-literally gravitating towards partners’ immaterial identities (including nuanced mindsets, personality features, temperaments, etc.). These gravitations are an irreplaceably vital aspect of ‘being in love’.

I’m definitely attracted to Jane, emotionally … Honestly, I was drawn to her from the get-go … I think, almost the moment we first met … I’m drawn to her personality … her spirit … who she is … End of the day, that’s why I love her. (Dan)

I reckon, like – we’ve lotsa emotional attraction and stuff, ya know? … Like, it’s a mega big reason … why we love each other … I love his stupid sense of humour … [and that] he’s a big, smart dork inside … [with] an [emotionally] attractive personality … He knows how to … pull me in, ya know? … I reckon, like, it’s a bit like … relationship spaghetti sauce or something … Gives us flavour (laughs). (Fiona)

I ain’t love if … there ain’t emotional attraction, mate … I ain’t havin’ any problems feelin’ her … I’m proper taken in by her … She takes me in … [with] her real feisty attitude … She’s a good person … ten times nicer … than most folks I meet, I’d bet … Ain’t surprisin’ … I’m [emotionally] attracted to her … I ain’t sayin’ shit like that lightly, know what I mean? (Ben)

I’d say, um – I really feel … emotionally attracted to … the man he is … his values … [and] how he treats people … It’s why I love him … I, um – I really can’t imagine … suddenly feeling any other way? (Rachel) [emphasis on emotional attraction in relation to ‘being in love’]

Interviewees’ emotional attractions reflect their intents to ‘look past’ or ‘beneath’ beloveds’ outward appearances. Entwined with sexual subjectification (discussed above), this cognitive directive helps to set ‘being in love’ apart from purely physical allures. Any immaterial allurements are thus felt by them to ensue from their sincere attentions to partners’ unique individualities. Fiona and Ben elaborate:

Okay, if it’s only, like – if we’re only into the physical stuff and all … I reckon, that’s not real love, ya know? … Jack’s physically attractive … [but] we’ve lotsa emotional attraction too … I’m not so shallow! … I’m not only bothered … with his looks … I reckon, ya know – I understand him … [and] I’m attracted to him … on a deeper level … a real emotional love, ya know? (Fiona)

118 On many occasions, interviewees make clear categorical, descriptive, and experiential distinctions between physical and emotional attraction. However, during other moments, both these alluring aspects appear to be meaningfully interlaced – as I will discuss at the end of this section.

119 Interviewees are of course exceedingly diverse in the emotionally attractive qualities they speak of. For instance, Dan focuses a lot on Jane’s enamouring “spirit … [and] kind soul” whilst Fiona describes Jack’s appealing “smartness … [and] playful personality”. Nonetheless, what all accounts share in common is each person’s perceptions of having their own ‘internalised’ selves figuratively ‘pulled in’ by those of beloveds’.

120 I use this phrase to indicate interviewees’ imaginings of directing their conscious focus towards partners’ contained identities.
Mate, I’ve been with women in the past … Most ways, I’m fuckin’ for the sake of fuckin’ … Sarah and me – we fuck a lot … [but] we got proper emotions … and feelin’ goin’ on … I care a lot … I’m makin’ proper effort to know her … I ain’t takin’ our [emotional] attraction for granted, mate … It ain’t normal for me … [to] be lovin’ someone … like this. (Ben) [emphasis on emotional attraction being more than physicality alone]

Processually (but not focally) akin to physical attraction, emotional attraction emerges from interviewees’ holistic / specific methods of evaluation – each meaningfully elaborative of the other.121 The first holistic method tunes into their broad appreciations for partners’ existential entireties that, to them, are worth immeasurably more than their formative facets, traits, etc. Yet, in other instances, interviewees are far more specific in assessing especially nuanced qualities of beloveds’ emotional attractiveness.

I’m honestly [emotionally] attracted … to who she is, as she is … Way I see it, I honestly can’t say I’m drawn to her because … “Oh, [it’s] because she’s like this, because she’s like that” … I don’t think … I’d pin her down … so simply … As human beings, I dunno – I think we’re far … too complex. (Dan) [emphasis on holistic emotional attraction]

Steve’s, um – he’s really incredibly hardworking … I’d say, er – when he sets his mind to something, it happens … I really find his attitude very [emotionally] attractive … very positive, very inspiring … I feel I’m … [also] really [emotionally] attracted to … [how] he puts people at ease – including me … He’s really very good … at calming me down. (Rachel) [emphasis on specific emotional attraction]

Emotional attraction is also highly multisensorial – but not in an immediately obvious way. More specifically, I suggest interviewees tend to unconsciously expand upon their base sensorial perceptions as a creative means of expressing the ‘pulls’ of partners’ non-physical aspects. For instance, Rachel often speaks of Steve's attractive ability to "really touch my heart ... [when] he's being sincere" [emphasis added]. Such a meaning-laden description is in fact implicitly reliant on her preceding grasps of tangible bodily experiences. However, in this case, Rachel is not talking about literal stimuli. Instead, she is subtly using touch as a figurative approach to conceiving – and hence, experiencing – her beloved’s ‘multisensorial’ emotionality. Other interviewees lean on similar subliminal elaborations of various root senses.

Yeah, I think … Jane’s just a sweet person – just the genuine kind … The world hasn’t soured her … I honestly think, yeah – that’s one thing … that makes her so [emotionally] appealing. (Dan)

Sarah’s got good sense to … sniff my bullshit out miles away, mate … She’s always knowin’ … [how] to feel me out … I’m taken in by her mind-readin’ … Ain’t got issues with it. (Ben)

121 Once more, these methods are not indebted to logical reasoning (i.e. contradictions, paradoxes, etc.).
Like, I reckon I’m [emotionally] attracted to … [the way] he understands me so well, like, so easily, ya know? … He truly sees me … [as] the semi-crazy idiot I am. (Fiona) [emphasis on the non-literal creative multisensoriality of emotional attraction]122

Interviewees’ emotional attractions are intimately linked with friendship. For starters, they often describe this style of attraction in terms of becoming increasingly attuned to beloveds’ ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ selves (also a key aspect of friendship). However, a fresh point I wish to add pivots on what I call ‘relational exclusivity’. I use this term to capture their aims to ‘truly’ understand partners to a comparatively greater and more privileged degree than most other persons (both within their own and partners’ lives).123 To this degree, the more relationally exclusive such understandings feel to them, the more experientially ascertained their emotional attractions become.

Yeah, I’d say, um – in some sense … I want our [emotional] attraction … to mean something special … I really want to feel, um – like I really do … know him well? … I guess, better than most people? … I feel, maybe – it’s part of … what I want … from our relationship – a real kind of bond. (Rachel)

Mate, I ain’t keen on … some guy comin’ around … sayin’ he gets Sarah best … sayin’ he’s best buds with her … [more than] her own boyfriend … Ain’t too different … if it’s a girl … I’m feelin’ … we’re sayin’ more [as a couple] … if we’re takin’ to [emotionally] favourin’ each other more. (Ben) [emphasis on relational exclusivity]

Amidst evolving self-experiences, interviewees clarify that long-term emotional attraction is not automatically guaranteed; rather, it must be actively cultivated via mutual efforts124 to sustain joint affinities / complimentary differences that define friendship. In other words, their figurative gravitations towards partners’ identities are provisional to the shared maintenance of interpersonal similarities (as covered in the previous chapter) – the success of which further enriches emotional attraction. Dan gives keen insight:

I think I’d be stupid … to take our [emotional] attraction for granted … [and] just expect something from nothing … Honestly, the way I see it – I just think every relationship needs work – everyone needs … to put in effort … We’ve tons in common as it is … [but] we’re always working on … staying in-sync … I think our [emotional] attraction’s … only going to get stronger … [as we] become more attuned … with each other … I think, yeah, I mean – we’re just doing what … normal couples ought to do. (Dan) [emphasis on similarity as a partial condition for far-reaching emotional attraction]

---

122 Imaginative adaptations of taste do not seem to feature as prominently as the other four senses.

123 Some special relationships are of course excluded from this comparative goal. For instance, Dan shares how Jane is “extremely close to her mum” – a bond “no one goes between”. Yet, for the most part, all interviewees stress their preferences for relational exclusivity – at least, with regards to the majority of ‘average’ friends, acquaintances, etc.

124 ‘Reciprocity’ is thus also relevant (see Chapter 11).
Emotional attraction is enlivened by ‘chemistry’. This experiential theme appears to thrive on two imaginative routes. First, interviewees see partners as capable of inspiring positive cognitive reactions within themselves. These reactions can be immediate – for instance, Jack’s ability to make Fiona “laugh like an idiot” – or endure for a lengthier time, such as Steve’s consistent skills at motivating Rachel to “stay optimistic … [and] as upbeat as possible”. Simultaneously, interviewees also avow their own capacities to bring about similar beneficial reactions in beloveds. This is instanced when Dan quickly helps Jane “cheer up … [when] she’s feeling down” or when Ben enacts his long-standing role in “helpin’ Sarah think … outside the box”. Together, both these imaginative routes rouse interviewees’ overall impressions of affecting, and being affected by, partners’ individualities – a symbiotic ‘chemical reaction’ (so to speak) that further affirms emotional attraction. As said by Fiona and Rachel:

Ya know, I reckon, like, the big thing ‘bout our [emotional] attraction … [is] we feed off each other, like – nearly all the time … He makes me laugh … [and] I’m kinda, like – I’m bringing out … the fun dork in him … We’re solid … [with] triggering one another, ya know? … A good kinda triggering … Our chemistry’s lit [i.e. slang for ‘excellent’]. (Fiona)

I really, um – I feel me and Steve – we’ve really … impacted each other’s lives … in very real ways … We’re very, um – we’ve a very real twin-flame chemistry … I’d say, um – we don’t feel superficial? … As in, I really feel … we’ve a healthy mutual influence … He naturally … motivates the best in me … [and] I’d say – I kinda … do the same for him. (Rachel) [emphasis highlights aspects of chemistry]

Partners’ ‘magnetic’ identities also lead interviewees’ to feel increasingly ‘near’ to them. To be clear, this observed nearness does not revolve around actual physical proximities; instead, it alludes to what I consider to be Heideggerian notions of “existential spatiality” (Mayeda 2006, p. 64). As Mayeda explains:

… existential spatiality determines nearness and distance based on the aspect of Dasein’s environment that is in focus at the moment. What is near is the matter of concern. What is distant is what recedes into the background, but which at any moment could become the matter of concern. Heidegger uses the example of eyeglasses. When looking at a picture on the wall, the object of focus – the picture – is what is nearest, while the glasses, part of the necessary but essentially unnoticed background – are described as far away. However, were the glasses to be scratched and hence become the focus point of awareness, then they become what is closest. (2006, p. 64)

Based on this explanation, I propose interviewees’ emotional attractions are experientially defined by their regular foregroundings of beloveds’ identities ‘in their minds’. In more everyday

---

125 This first aspect of interpersonal chemistry is closely related to self-growth (Chapter 7) – but is referred to by interviewees’ in a slightly different manner due to the accompanying presence of the second imaginative route.
language, they explain how extensive exposures to partners’ immaterial allurements, in effect, often invigorate them to “think about him a lot” (Fiona) – especially so when “we ain’t together … face-to-face” (Ben).126 This non-literal nearness is best described by Dan:

I think – honestly, I don’t think ... I’ve ever... felt this [emotionally] attracted before – not to this level ... *She’s on my mind* ... *quite a fair bit* ... I walk past the shops ... [and] stop in ... [to] see if there’s anything she’d like ... I spend a lot of time ... figuring out ways to ... cheer her up ... if she’s upset ... I think, definitely, yeah – *she’s often ... on my mind*. (Dan) [emphasis on Heideggerian nearness]

Self-perceived shifts in temporal pacing are also an occasional byproduct of interviewees’ emotional attractions – mostly amidst ‘deep’ conversations with beloveds.127 These shifts vary slightly in nature. For instance, Fiona and Dan describe how "time flies" (Fiona) and "goes by quick" (Dan) when they are drawn into particularly engaging talks. Meanwhile, Rachel and Ben feel "lost in our own time" (Rachel), making them wonder “how it went by" (Ben). Regardless, a common feature running through these accounts lies with interviewees’ imaginings of briefly altered time speeds vis-a-vis what they deem to be a ‘normal’ pace of life.128

We’re just talking … [and] *hours go by ... just quicker than I know*. (Dan)

Like, we were … up on the roof or something … having a deep-and-meaningful [conversation] … We kinda chatted – I reckon, like, maybe four, five hours? … *Time flew by*. (Fiona)

I’m speakin’ to her on Skype … [and] I’m goin’ “Shit! Sun’s up!” … *I ain’t even noticed*. (Ben)

I really feel, um – I’d say, we’re very … easily prone to ... *losing track of time* ... [when] we’re together. (Rachel) [emphasis on short-term shifts in temporal pacing]

Interviewees’ emotional attractions seem to abide to implicit conceptual / representational patterns of evaluation. To begin with, each person has his / her own abstract conceptions of various human ideals, values, virtues, dispositions, etc. For example, Dan describes ‘faith’ as “believing in something … [and] letting it fill your heart” whilst ‘honesty’ for Rachel means “being true to yourself … [and] others”. Concurrently, interviewees also regard their beloveds as living

---

126 I posit that interviewees’ existential-spatial ‘nearness’ to beloveds is partly linked to physical closeness. In particular, more time spent in person seems to foster an increased likelihood of them thinking about partners when apart.

127 ‘Deep’ here is simply an interpreted shorthand for interviewees’ focused and convivial talks with partners that go largely uninterrupted by other persons, situations, environments, etc.

128 What counts as ‘normal’ is subject to each interviewee’s individualised perceptions of time passing at a familiar and predictable speed (based on his / her average day-to-day experiences). Thus, any perceived temporal shifts entail a felt-displacement from this relative norm.
representations of some of these concepts (e.g. Jane has ‘faith’, Steve is ‘honest’, etc.). In this respect, I propose their emotional attractions often gain strength in accordance with the degree partners are thought to embody these concepts (i.e. greater perceived conformances beget heightened allurements).

Mate, most folks say they’re carin’ … to the elderly … I’m goin’ – if they’re sayin’ they care … [then] carin’ is all in the actions, mate … [But] they ain’t doin’ shit … They’re only talkin’ … Carin’ is helpin’ someone else … [by] doin’ somethin’ real … Sarah volunteers at elderly homes, mate … Every fuckin’ week! … She’s showin’ she really cares … She ain’t only sayin’ it … I’m seein’ her do her thing, all the time … [and] I’m feelin’ myself more … taken in … [by] her. (Ben)

Like, to me, being creative … [is] learning to let go … [and] fully express yourself … Jack’s super creative, ya know? … He, like – he comes up with all these … wacky YouTube ideas for me … [that] seem way, way out there … [but] I reckon, like – he’s secretly brilliant! … I reckon, like – I’m increasingly emotionally attracted to … his creative side … It took me a while to see it … [but] he surprises me. (Fiona) [emphasis highlights conceptual / representational evaluations vis-à-vis stronger emotional attraction]

On one hand, it is clear both physical and emotional attraction remain categorically distinct to interviewees amidst their ‘ideal' instances of 'being in love'. To begin with, they are able to consistently describe and differentiate qualities that perpetuate each style of attraction (e.g. treating bodily traits as part of physical but not necessarily emotional attraction, regarding friendship as far more central to character allures than corporeal ones, etc.). However, what is interesting to note is how interviewees simultaneously value partners’ attractiveness in indistinct ways – sans the need to reduce their appeals to exact physical or emotional reasons. To this degree, I posit it is precisely this concurrent, seemingly counterintuitive, condition of distinctiveness / indistinctiveness which defines the general quality of this super-ordinate theme. Dan and Rachel lend weight to this point:

Honestly, end of the day – I think, I’m just naturally … attracted to her on so many levels … emotionally, physically … [But] I don’t think, yeah – I wouldn’t boil it down … to just one specific thing … We’re just … attracted to each other … in general. (Dan)

---

129 In cyclical meaning-making fashion, I interpret partners’ actioning of these abstract concepts simultaneously informs interviewees of what such values, ideals, etc. concretely entail – beyond mere abstractions. For instance, Ben’s frequent observations of Sarah’s ‘tough’ behaviors show him “what toughness’s … all about”. This in turn further evolves his ideational understanding of this virtue, consequently influencing how he sees Sarah, and so on.

130 To put it in slightly different terms, interviewees’ gravitations towards beloveds are at times experienced in a totalising manner, not simply the case of individually naming and / or ‘adding up’ the latter’s ‘pulling’ bodily / immaterial features.
Of course, he’s physically attractive ... Our emotional attraction’s ... stronger than ever ... I really feel, um – I’d say, for me … our attraction’s ... a mush of everything ... rolled into one.

(Rachel) [emphasis highlights coexisting distinction / indistinction of attraction]

As per my modus operandi, I will now explore a few of the aforementioned experiential themes in greater schematic detail – first for physical, then emotional attraction.

9.2. Image Schemas of Physical and Emotional Attraction

On a fairly obvious level, physical attraction is grounded in bodily experiences construed via interviewees’ direct sensorial perceptions of partners’ bodies (e.g. their biologically-enabled abilities to see, touch, etc. them). However, what is less obvious is how these base stimuli are meaningfully enriched from implicit creative extensions of various image schemas. One such possible schema is ATTRACTION. Johnson suggests we initially become aware of this embodied logic as “a kind of gravitation toward an object” (1987, p. 47-48) due to pulling FORCES that “can be either actual or potential” (1987, p. 48; see Cervel 1999). This recurring pattern may thus involve real physical events, like when “a magnet draws a piece of steel toward itself” (Johnson 1987, p. 47), or be expanded into abstract meanings, such as “when we feel ourselves physically attracted to some other person” (Johnson 1987, p. 48; see Figure 4).

![Figure 4: ATTRACTION image schema (Johnson 1987, p. 47) [Note: Lines here represent actual or potential pulling FORCES]](image)

Here, I suggest interviewees’ figurative (i.e. cognitive) physical attractions are, at the heart of them, imaginatively reliant on their latent embodied grasps of ATTRACTION. This image schema seems to interlace with their everyday uses of the A PERSON IS A CONTAINER metaphor, quietly structuring their impressions of having ‘boundaried’ foci that are attentively ‘pulled’ towards partners’ physicalities. On the flipside, expressions like these would lose their current coherency without such schematic support.

---

131 Interviewees’ thoughts on their literal (i.e. bodily) gravitations towards partners also reflect abstract instances of ATTRACTION – since no actual ‘pulling’ FORCES are compelling them to move closer (i.e. they are imagined).
I’m drawn to … how she looks. (Dan)

I reckon, like – he knows I find him attractive. (Fiona)

Mate, I’m taken in … [whenever] she’s dolled up, lookin’ sexy. (Ben)

I’m really attracted to his height. (Rachel) [emphasis on ATTRACTION-reliant reasoning]

Interviewees’ nascent learnings of PART-WHOLE seem to frame their specific / holistic apprehendings of physical attractiveness. More specifically, I postulate this corporeally-acquired logic aids them in seeing beloveds’ particular features (e.g. eyes, mouth, mannerisms, demeanours, etc.) as biological / valuational PARTS that belong to the CONFIGURED WHOLE of their bodily appearances / allures. The same schema is also the sine qua non to their equally ongoing assessments of partners’ overall (i.e. WHOLE) appearances being qualitatively greater than their formative aspects (i.e. PARTS).¹³²

I feel he really dresses well … [and] takes the effort to look good … [That’s] partly what ... makes him [physically] attractive. (Rachel)

I think, yeah, it’s not … any one aspect of her appearance … She’s just … [physically] attractive on the whole. (Dan) [emphasis on PART-WHOLE logic]

COLLECTION (Johnson 2007, p. 181) quietly spurs interviewees’ reflections on their multisensorial experiences. This schema pertains to the embodied “pattern of adding objects¹³³ to a group or pile” (Johnson 2007, p. 181), thus instilling our senses of certain things being “sums of individual objects” (Raubal et al. 1997, p. 96). Applied to our current context, I believe the objects at hand are non-literarily, involving instead interviewees’ imaginative demarcations (i.e. objectifying) of stimuli according to sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste. Amidst their physical attractions, these conceptually individualised senses are felt to accumulate (i.e. COLLECT) into various bodily activities – which in themselves add up (i.e. again, COLLECT) into wider notions of intimacy. Dan and Fiona’s descriptions exemplify this interpretation:

Kissing’s my favourite foreplay … I reckon, like, ya know – I like how … our lips touch … the kissing noises … It’s all sensual. (Fiona)

What’s intimate? … To me, I think, yeah – it’s caressing … holding … the way we … speak to each other … Everything really. (Dan) [emphasis on multisensorial / activity COLLECTION]

¹³² Such elaborate meanings also seem indebted to the COLLECTION schema, discussed below.
¹³³ This pattern is thus tied up with the OBJECT schema that first “emerges from our interaction with discrete entities in the world” (Santibañez 2002, p. 199).
COMPULSION “has [an] internal structure consisting of a force vector (with a certain magnitude and direction), an entity acted upon by the force, and a potential trajectory the entity will traverse” (Johnson 1987, p. 4). This embodied structure most often reveals itself via our bodily feelings of “being moved by external forces” (Johnson 1987, p. 45) which compel “you to move along a path you may not have chosen, by a force you seem unable to resist” (Johnson 1987, p. 45). Many experiential realms are subtended by this basic pattern – for example, our perceptions of “being moved by … wind, water, physical objects, and other people” (Johnson 1987, p. 45) or, on a more abstract level, “the social domain [where] peer pressure is [creatively] experienced as a force that makes an individual conform to communal standards of dressing, behaving, etc.” (Marmaridou 2000, p. 58).

From the above explication, I infer interviewees’ ‘natural’ and / or ‘involuntary’ physical attractions are partly imbued from their underlying knowledges of this schema. Specifically, their propositions of being unable to fully resist the non-literal ‘pull’ of partners’ bodies are intimately derived from the skeletal logic of COMPULSIVE FORCE – the absence of which would collapse such ideational meanings.

Ain’t no way … I’m resistin’ her, mate … Back then, I couldn’t help … bein’ all over her. (Ben)

I’m really quite, um – I feel I’m quite conservative … [But] with him – I found it … hard to say ‘no’. … I guess, uh – maybe our urges were … too strong to ignore. (Rachel) [emphasis highlights COMPULSION-inspired meanings]

Unlike COMPULSION where forces act on us, ENABLEMENT (Johnson 1987, p. 47) is an image schema based on our innate abilities to act upon the ‘things of the world’. This embodied structure primarily emerges “when people become aware that they have some power to carry out some action” (Cervel 1999, p. 199). As detailed by Johnson:

If you choose to focus on your acts of manipulation and movement, you can become aware of a felt sense of power (or lack of power) to perform some action. You can sense that you have the power to pick up the baby, the groceries, and the broom but not to lift the front end of your car. While there is no actualized force vector here … [I]here are potential force vectors present, and there is a definite ‘directedness’ (or potential path of motion) present. (1987, p. 47)

In my opinion, it is interviewees’ preceding discoveries of ENABLEMENT which implicitly allow them to see themselves as free to respond to the COMPULSIVE FORCES of partners’ physicalities. More particularly, this key experiential structure flourishes their more elaborate conceptions of
being autonomous persons with the potential power (i.e. ENABLEMENT) to voluntarily, rather than helplessly, direct their attentions / bodies to indulge in beloveds’ bodily allurements.

Real [physical] intimacy – I think, yeah, that’s something I chose … End of the day, honestly – anyone can just jump into bed … with just near anyone … {But] yeah, I think – yeah, it says more about our [physical] exclusivity … [that] I decided on her … choose not to [physically] stray … [and] she picked me. (Dan) [emphasis on voluntary ENABLEMENT]

Meanwhile, PART-WHOLE discreetly moulds interviewees’ habits of valuating their ‘subjective’ physical attractions as one out of myriad possible preferences (i.e. PART of a WHOLE spectrum of people’s views).

I reckon, like I said – Jack being dark – I find him attractive … [but] that’s my opinion … There’s lotsa other people … [with] a whole bunch of opinions out there … [on] who’s attractive, who’s not attractive. (Fiona) [emphasis alludes to PART-WHOLE subjective reasoning]

Combined with PART-WHOLE, MATCHING structurally underlies interviewees’ ‘subjectively objective’ thoughts of having similar / different (i.e. MATCHING / UNMATCHING) physical tastes vis-à-vis overall (i.e. WHOLE) societal standards. Again, these meanings may initially appear highly abstract in nature – but, in actuality, are deeply enrooted in body-capacitated reasoning.

I’m likin’ the same things … most guys are likin’ my age, mate … Ain’t gonna act I ain’t into … big tits … [and a] big Kim Kardashian ass. (Ben)

Um, I really don’t care much … if Steve … puts on a little weight. … I’d say, er – I feel maybe other people – maybe they’d mind? … Maybe I’m different … [because] I don’t really bother with … his weight much … Other people … might not agree, I guess. (Rachel) [emphasis on (UN)MATCHING / PART-WHOLE-dependent expressions]

Emotional attraction shares many similar schematic structures with physical attraction - albeit with imaginative variations. For instance, ATTRACTION enables interviewees' perceptions of being ‘pulled in’ by partners’ internally CONTAINED qualities. However, I suggest there is an additional pattern of SURFACE (Johnson 1987, p. 126)\(^\text{134}\) that, along with CONTAINER, propels their creative senses of ‘looking past’ or ‘beneath’ beloveds’ outward appearances (i.e. CONTAINED SURFACE). Meanwhile, PART-WHOLE remains the genesis for their specific / holistic evaluations of emotionally attractive aspects – although, here, metaphorical extensions are used to convey immaterial (rather than bodily) qualities.

\(^{134}\) Johnson does not elaborate on the details of this image schema. Kuhn & Frank nonetheless suggest this basic structure “embodies the logic of a surface on which items can be put” (1991, p. 426). I expand on this definition, positing SURFACE to involve our bodily recognitions of various OBJECTS possessing covers or exteriors.
Jane’s always been attractive to me … I’m drawn to her emotionally … her spirit within. (Dan) [emphasis on ATTRACTION / CONTAINER logic]

For love, like, I reckon … it’s way, way more than … how someone looks … on the surface, ya know? … Someone can, like – he can be hot … on the outside … [but] I reckon … what he’s like inside … counts even more. (Fiona) [emphasis highlights SURFACE / CONTAINER imaginative elaborations]

Her carin’ is a small part of it, mate … Her overall personality’s proper solid. (Ben) [emphasis on PART-WHOLE structuring]

I’d say, um – I really feel … he’s such a sincere guy … That’s a huge portion of why … he’s so attractive. (Rachel) [emphasis on PART-WHOLE]

Interviewees’ desires for relational exclusivity are heavily dependent on SCALE and MATCHING. These schemas subtly structure their wishes to know beloveds' 'true selves' to a better extent (i.e. a greater qualitative SCALE) compared to other persons (i.e. an UNMATCHED level). Once more, I assert such experiential meanings would be incoherent to both interviewees and us if not for the near-ubiquitous embodied logics that construe them.

Yeah, I think … I know Jane better … compared to most people. (Dan)

I’d say, um, I probably see the real him … more than his casual friends? (Rachel) [emphasis suggests SCALE / UNMATCHED creative extensions]

Cognitive foregroundings of beloveds rely on tacit learnings of NEAR-FAR. Indeed, readers can specifically observe how many of interviewees’ allusions to partners’ existential-spatial ‘nearness’ are, at their core, meaningfully beholden to the primordial bodily orientations / proximities that make up this schematic structure.

She ain’t never … strayin’ too far from my mind, mate. (Ben)

I reckon, like – I play it down a lot and all that … [but] he knows … he’s always close to my heart. (Fiona) [emphasis on NEAR-FAR patterns]

Changing experiences of time are also schematic. In particular, interviewees tend to associate temporal speeds with figurative movement, unknowingly instancing the TIME IS A MOVING OBJECT metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson 1980b, p. 45). In addition, any altered pacings are judged as being dissimilar to (i.e. UNMATCHING) their 'normal' senses of time.

135 This metaphor is schematically premised on PATH (Ahrens & Huang 2002, p. 508) and OBJECT (Lakoff & Johnson 1980b, p. 114).
I think … *time whizzes by …* [when] we’re lost in conversation … [or] distracting each other. [Ben] [emphasis on **TIME IS A MOVING OBJECT** metaphor (**PATH** / **OBJECT**)]

Um, I’m normally really very good … [at] keeping track of time … [but] I’d say – um, when I’m with him – sometimes it’s **different** … I’m less on the ball. (Rachel) [emphasis on **UNMATCHING**]

Interfusing extensions of **MATCHING** and **CONTAINER** partly form interviewees’ gauges of partners’ *degrees of conformity* (i.e. extent of **MATCHING**) to their various *mentally bounded* ideals, beliefs, values, etc. (i.e. categorical **CONTAINERS**)\(^\text{136}\)

I think *empathy’s learning to … put yourself … in another’s shoes …* Yeah, I think Jane’s empathetic. (Dan)

Like, being reliable – I reckon that means … I can count on that person, ya know – like, whatever situation …. Jack’s definitely reliable – well, mostly (laughs). (Fiona) [emphasis on abstract **CONTAINMENT** of definitions and conceptual / representational **MATCHES**]

The above schematic explorations (along with others not covered here) illuminate the often-hidden embodied nature of interviewees’ physical / emotional attractions. I will now explore a few possible cultural meaning-templates that equally contribute to their processes of meaning-making.

9.3. Cultural Meaning-Templates of Physical and Emotional Attraction

Alongside biographical / schematic influences, sedimented cultural meaning-templates also guide interviewees’ canonical inclusions of physical attraction vis-à-vis their ‘ideal’ moments of ‘being in love’. For starters, I opine the far-reaching echoes of 12th century ‘courtly love’ have latently socialised them to *assume sexual desire / eroticism to be a natural aspect of their intimate partnerships*. Readers may refer to Ackerman (1994), Berkowitz (2012), de Rougemont (1983), May (2011), Paz (1993), and Tuchman (1978) for nuanced historical accounts of this Western ideological framework. For now, what is relevant to our discussion is the pioneering custom of courtly love known as *assag* or *assai* (Paz 1993, p. 107). This was a supposed ‘physical test’ of love which involves, amongst other things, a man “contemplating [a woman] naked … [and] getting into her bed with her and engaging in various caresses” (Paz 1993, p. 107-108). According to Paz, this and other body-focused courtly expressions were later adapted by the creative likes of Dante, Petrarch, and the Surrealist poets of the 20th century – most recently subsumed into “the

\(^{136}\) See Johnson (1987, p. 180) for his explanation of the **CATEGORIES ARE CONTAINERS** metaphor.
highest forms of [modern] art and literature in the West [and] also in songs, films, and popular myths” (1993, p. 121). Today, part of the enduring legacy of courtly love is defined by the now taken-for-granted induction of eroticised corporealities into the ‘cult of love’ (May 2011, p. 120) – a handed-down sensibility that has ignited “many imaginations on fire from the twentieth century to our own day” (Paz 1993, p. 134).137

It would appear these imaginations include those of interviewees who, as their previous / proceeding vernacular responses imply, seem to presume that “there can be no love without eroticism, just as there can be no eroticism without sexuality” (Paz 1993, p. 128).138

Way I see it, I think … when you love someone, you’ll naturally want … to be physically intimate with them … Honestly, it goes without saying – hearts, bodies, minds … To me, when we’re [physically] intimate … I think we’re just acting on our love. (Dan)

I reckon, like – ya know, our sexual stuff and all … matters as a couple, ya know? … I haven’t heard, like – I don’t know any couple – like, loving couples … [that] say they don’t need … [or] they don’t want to have any [physical] action. (Fiona)

Mate, I ain’t some priest … I love her … [and] I love sex … Two things go hand in hand, mate. (Ben)

Um, me and him – we took a while to … reach our real comfort zone, physically … Now, I feel, um – it’s really … helped to deepen our love. (Rachel) [emphasis hints at cultural associations of love with physical eroticism / sexuality]

Cultural meaning-templates of the five senses also seem to covertly inspire how interviewees interpret their multisensorial experiences with partners. For instance, Reinarz describes how “the basic olfactory classification … recounted in nearly every historical study of smell, was to associate desirable women with pleasant fragrances and those deemed less desirable with foul stenches” (2014, p. 116). This still-persistent sensorial correlation exemplifies long-standing Western cultural beliefs that aromas “could function as a synecdoche for other kinds of olfactory

Unfortunately, courtly love – with its heavy “focus on men at the expense of women” (Burns 2001, p. 23) – has also engendered what Burns considers to be a “precursor of the highly misogynistic system of modern Western romantic love” (2001, p. 23). However, amidst our current context, all interviewees – regardless of their gender – do not appear to consciously see ‘being in love’ and its physical aspects as blindly skewed towards male preferences. Whether these perceptions are in fact euphemised misogyny is another topic of discussion, not to be covered here.

Other preceding (and still proliferated) cultural meaning-templates may also have an unconscious bearing on interviewees’ mergers of physical attraction with ‘being in love’. For instance, Teo – analysing ‘love letters’ written by Australians during 1860 to 1960 – concludes that “physical attraction had always been a vital component of romantic love in the nineteenth century” (2005, p. 356). This conceptual assumption is likely to have spilled over into everyday behaviors of the present 21st century – to which interviewees are a part of. Earlier Australian media messages conjoining love with sex (Goodfriend 2012, p. 67) and a pervasive “sexualisation of modernity” (Holmes 1995, p. 9) are also potential sources of influence.
pleasures, namely bodily ones, such as pleasure in a lover’s breath or sweat” (Dugan 2011, p. 58). Touch and sight have also been historically eroticised and publicly propagated. For instance, the period following the Renaissance is renowned for spreading “the sexualisation of the representation of touch … [which] became part of the repertoire of [visual] images in the fine arts” (Gilman 1991, p. 40).

Ackerman (1990) and Howes (ed. 2005) offer further insights on Western developments of the above and other senses – which I will not detail due to space constraints. However, gender bias notwithstanding, my loose assertion here is that interviewees’ sensorially-enriched intimacies with partners are not fully discerned through their own imaginative prowess alone. Instead, I propose their experiences are, at least to some degree, influenced by historically consigned sight, sound, touch, etc. meanings that transcend – yet are uniquely customised by – their embodied individualities. This claim is partly supported by the subsequent kinds of perceptual descriptions that are strongly reminiscent of the aforesaid cultural elaborations:

Sarah’s sexy as all hell … [when] she’s dressed up nice … her hair’s all done … [and] she’s smellin’ of perfume … I ain’t helpin’ myself … bein’ a bit turned on. (Ben)

We’re lying down … [and] I feel her breathing close … I think, yeah – honestly, that’s almost as sensual … as actually touching. (Dan)

I reckon, like – we work up quite a sweat … [That’s] half the fun! (laughs) (Fiona)

I’d say, um – I really do love … the way he touches me, very gently … It feels pretty erotic. (Rachel)

Interviewees’ emotional attractions are equally persuaded by culture – in particular, their general understandings of what ‘emotions’ entail. As Dixon notes:

The word “emotion” has named a psychological category and a subject for systematic enquiry only since the 19th century. Before then, relevant mental states were categorised variously as “appetites,” “passions,” “affections,” or “sentiments.” The word “emotion” has existed in English since the 17th century … It came into much wider use in 18th-century English, often to refer to mental experiences, becoming a fully fledged theoretical term in the following century, especially through the influence of two Scottish philosopher-physicians, Thomas Brown and Charles Bell. (2012, p. 338)

---

139 In earlier periods of Europe, cultural connections between smell and bodily allures also included prospects of love, whereby “to arouse desire [via olfaction] without betraying modesty was the basic rule of the game of love” (Corbin 1986, p. 176).

140 Western histories of the five senses are often steeped in men’s eroticisations of women (as reflected by the above examples). However, at least amongst interviewees, amalgamations of sight, touch, sound, etc. with eroticism appear to be mostly evenly practiced by both genders.
To this end, I posit interviewees' descriptive use of 'emotions' to refer to their own and partners' mental worlds are not simply conjured out of nowhere; instead, such definitions seem to indicate their subliminal assimilations of the above and other lingering historical impulses. These impulses, in effect, filter into their casual distinctions of emotional attraction as a primarily psychological, rather than physical, phenomenon. The following responses propel this general claim:

I’m drawn to … connecting with her … on an emotional level – a mental level. (Dan)

I reckon, like, our psyches … naturally gel … Like, it’s part of our emotional attraction and stuff, ya know? (Fiona)

My head’s in one place … She’s mind-readin’ me … [and] we’re clickin’, emotionally. (Ben)

I’d say, um – I’m really mostly … emotionally attracted to Steve … [for] his unique mind. (Rachel) [emphasis on cultural learnings of ‘emotions’ as mental states]

Interviewees’ notions of having chemistry with beloveds exude similar signs of cultural impact. To begin with, the salient Western meaning of ‘chemistry’ has been extensively expanded on and modified across the centuries (Cobb & Goldwhite 1995; Ihde 1984). However, it is Pauling, amongst other pioneering figures, who has contributed to current mainstream definitions of the word as “the science of substances – their structure, their properties, and the reactions that change them into other substances” (1947, p. 1). In such regards, I propose one of these scientific premises (namely, the occurrence of literal chemical reactions) has in turn fruitfully inspired the modern folk analogy of interpersonal ‘chemistry’ – a concept referring to figurative reactions between two persons. This creative extension remains popular via surfeit everyday texts, including definitions / narratives put forth by dating coaches (e.g. O’Malley 2012; Thompson 2011), relationship advisers (e.g. Cantu 2009; Watters 2010), and news / lifestyle articles (e.g. Berger 2016; Davis 2014; Krupka 2015), amongst myriad other resources. Together, they contribute to the commonplace idea that

… when we talk about chemistry, we often talk about how “it felt like we had an instant connection,” or “we just had so much to talk about,” or “I just had so much fun I lost track of time!” … Part of what makes for good chemistry is to affect someone on an emotional level …

141 Refer to Matt & Stearns (eds 2014), Plamper (2012), and Rosenwein (2016) For more in-depth investigations into the Western history of emotions, including the lasting legacy of Cartesian duality.
It’s all well and good to be able to engage someone intellectually, but you need to spur an emotional reaction as well. (O’Malley 2012, n.p.)

In my view, interviewees’ perceived mutual reactions with beloveds allude to their largely unbeknownst exposures to, and concurrent appropriations of, the above cultural meaning-template. This probable influence is reflected in Fiona and Rachel’s previously shared responses, and also permeates Dan and Ben’s expressions:

I just think, I dunno – it’s just our normal chemistry … We just respond and react easily to one another. (Dan)

She and I … got proper chemistry, mate … We’re always knowin’ … [how to] affect each other. (Ben) [emphasis on cultural impressions of interpersonal chemistry]

A treasure throve of other cultural meaning-templates invigorate interviewees’ physical and emotional attractions – the majority of which I will not explore here. Regardless, what I have covered throughout this chapter serves to illustrate how such experiences are meaningfully flourished via a holistic admixture of individual, schematic, and environmental factors.

9.4. Conclusion

Attraction is a key experiential ingredient of interviewees ‘ideal’ conditions of ‘being in love’. This super-ordinate theme is made up of ‘physical’ and ‘emotional’ aspects of allurement. Physical attraction is defined by their: 1) senses of being literally / figuratively ‘drawn in’ by beloveds’ corporeal appearances, 2) holistic and specific evaluations – the first focused on partners’ overall physicalities, the second on specific nuances, 3) multisensorial bodily appreciations, comprising sight, touch, sound, smell, and taste, 4) concurrent beliefs in their involuntary / voluntary gravitations towards beloveds’ materialities, 5) subjective (i.e. personal) and subjectively objective assessments (i.e. in relation to perceived societal standards of physical attractiveness), 6) eroticisms that entail symbolisation (i.e. imaginative transformations of partners’ bodies into representations of past / future sexual desires) and reciprocal sexual tension (i.e. processual / accumulative build towards physical release), 7) sexual subjectification, implying seeing beloveds’ eroticised aesthetics as a mere part of their whole existential identities, 8) future-oriented hopes

142 However, variating slightly from this definition, interviewees do seem to include ‘intellectual’ engagements as part of their emotional chemistries with partners.
for maintained sexual intimacies, 9) value-added familiarities, characterised by their increasing recognitions of partners’ corporeal attributes that lead to other experiences (e.g. preferred physical interactions, increased eroticisms, long-term attraction, etc.).

Meanwhile, interviewees’ emotional attractions comprise their: 1) feelings of being non-literally ‘pulled in’ by partners’ ‘internal’ identities, 2) motivations to ‘look past’ / ‘beneath’ their outward appearances, 3) holistic / specific appraisals respectively attuned to beloveds’ overall identities and more specific personal qualities, 4) creative conceptions of emotional appeals, discreetly based off their core multisensorial perceptions, 5) desires for relational exclusivity (i.e. knowing partners’ ‘true’ selves to a better extent than most others), 6) sustenance of interpersonal similarity, as discussed in the previous chapter on friendship, 7) symbiotic chemistries, in which both parties cognitively react to each other, 8) frequent foregrounding of beloveds in their minds (i.e. existential-spatial nearness), 9) occasionally shifting perceptions of time in relation to ‘normal’ temporal pacings, 10) conceptual / representational evaluations, whereby greater congruencies between the two fuel their increased emotional attractions.

Amidst all these complex experiential themes, interviewees’ broad attractions vis-à-vis ‘being in love’ are prevailingly defined by their simultaneous distinctions / indistinctions of physical and emotional desirability (sans adherence to strict logical reasoning). That is to say, they are able to categorically identify the differences between the two whilst at the same time prefer to restrain from filtering beloveds’ allurements down to exact corporeal / immaterial features.

In conclusion, this chapter, like others before, showcases how interviewees’ attractions are meaningfully instilled via an organic unfurling of their unique life situations, schematic learnings, and contextual socialisations. The same route of enquiry will now be applied to the next integral aspect of their loving relationships – namely, ‘altruism’.
10. Altruism

“I finally understood what true love really meant … love meant that you care for another person’s happiness more than your own …”

( Sparks 2006, p. 275)

Along with self-growth, friendship, and attraction, interviewees consistently elevate ‘altruism’ as yet another shared quality of their ‘ideal’ moments of ‘being in love’. Ben gives an early clue on the general nature of this super-ordinate theme – albeit without using the exact term I have given.

I know I’m talkin’ shit ‘bout us for laughs … [but] mate, I ain’t sayin’ it lightly … [when] I’m sayin’ I love her … Her life ain’t been easy before … [so] I ain’t ever wishin’ ill on her, know what I mean? … I’m wantin’ … Sarah’s life to be better … I’m wantin’ good things for her.

Dan, Fiona, and Rachel express comparable experiences, each in their own way.

I think, yeah – there’s many times … [where] I think it’s my duty, as a partner … just to be by her side … [and] support her as much as possible … I love her … [and] I just want her to thrive … I want her to take off – just to be the best she can be … I think, yeah – to me, that’s just what love is to me, how it ought to be … I honestly – I can’t see myself being any other way with her.

(Dan)

Like, I reckon, ya know – Jack’s a big dream-chaser … I love him … [and] I love seeing him, ya know – like, seeing him so inspired and stuff … My big thing is, I reckon, like – I love urging him on, cheering him on … I’m legit keen to see him … live big and all that … I love seeing him get better … especially [with] his professional surfing … [and] business stuff and all that … I reckon, like – I’ve lotsa joy seeing him succeed.

(Fiona)

I’d say, um – Steve’s really been … so supportive of my art career … I really, um – I really want to do the same for him? … Time to time, um – he really struggles sometimes, coping with a lot of stress … [and] I’m really trying to … be there for him … I really share my ideas on, um

143 On a purely philosophical level, altruism seems counterintuitive to self-growth (e.g. how can a person be selfless yet also stand to gain personal benefits?). To this end, I wish to reiterate a point made at the start of Part B – specifically, that interviewees’ experiences of these super-ordinate themes may be spaced out across reasonable time-frames (i.e. they need not be felt at the exact same moment). As such, it is entirely possible for them to feel themselves ‘grow as persons’ in some instances whilst benevolently attending to partners during others. In addition, altruism – like other taken-for-granted experiences based on fluid imagination – is not restricted to either / or logic. Thus, interviewees may occasionally perceive both self-growth and altruism at once, without seeming too concerned with esoteric contradictions.

144 Interviewees did not directly use the word ‘altruism’ in their responses. However, I have chosen this label as an interpreted shorthand for their regular expressions of caring for, nurturing, supporting, etc. their beloveds amidst ‘being in love’.
– maybe, how to turn things around? … As in, I really feel me loving him … [is] really about 
these moments … [where] I can try to … care for him, really encourage him … be there for him … [and] try to make things better. (Rachel)

From these types of responses, I use the term ‘altruism’ to refer to interviewees’ *sincere wishes for the continual betterment of partners’ lives*. Naturally, this broad statement requires further experiential, schematic, and cultural delineation.

### 10.1. Experiential Themes of Altruism

As introduced above, interviewees’ altruisms entail their desires for partners’ lives to become better – but better in what aspect exactly? Here, I propose they are most inclined to *link betterment with notions of goodness*. Of course, ‘goodness’ is on its own an exceedingly polysemous concept. However, in this specific context, I interpret it to pertain to interviewees’ *hopes for beloveds to be ‘as good as they can be’ across various situations*. ‘Good’\(^\text{145}\) is thus synonymous to partners’ improvements (i.e. bettering) in their self-experiences, activities / practices, and so on (to be discussed in greater detail further on). Dan and Fiona offer initial hints at what is meant:

End of the day – I think, yeah – I *just want Jane … [to] be as happy as she can be … … I mean, I’ll be honest – life’s just challenging … I dunno – how I see it, we believe in God … [but] I don’t think … [that] just makes life a walk in the park, not automatically … [So] I think, yeah, with all that going on … I’m just – I’m always praying for the best for her … [and that] everything she does … turns out well for her … as much as possible. (Dan)

Jack – ya know, he’s always shown me … he’s lotsa passion and stuff … I reckon, he’s so much gusto, ya know? … I said, like, before … I love cheering him on … [and] seeing him do … all these amazing and awesome stuff and all … I love supporting him … [and] seeing him … hit all his targets … as much as he can hit them, ya know? (Fiona) [emphasis on supports for partners to be as good as they can be]

Interviewees regard goodness vis-à-vis altruism as highly ‘*subjective*’. However, unlike attraction, subjectiveness here is far less focused on their own personal viewpoints. Instead, it hinges heavily on what they imagine to be partners’ personal discernments of what counts as ‘good’.\(^\text{146}\) To this

---

\(^{145}\) Interviewees seldom explicitly speak of ‘goodness’ *per se*. However, they very often express its many valuational associations / manifestations (e.g. seeing something as *positive, beneficial, enhancing, etc.* for beloveds in some form or another).

\(^{146}\) These partner-oriented imaginings still ultimately happen within interviewees’ own self-experiences (i.e. they cannot literally ‘step into’ beloveds’ minds to read them, so to speak). As such, their impressions of beloveds’ subjective goodness definitions inevitably remain ‘best guesses’ based on fore-conceptions of what partners are like (via interactions, impressions, etc.).
degree, then, interviewees’ altruisms mostly center on their encouragements for beloveds to achieve / strive towards ‘being good’ – according to the latter’s self-defined (i.e. subjective) terms.\footnote{Of course, interviewees may at times feel the need to express their differing opinions on what is most beneficial to beloveds. This can lead to some subjective goodness disagreements between both parties – as I will soon discuss.}

Other day she’s tellin’ me … she’s wantin’ to rise up … in her company … [and] wantin’ to take over some shits [i.e. useless people] … I’m thinkin’, “good on her!” … I’m backin’ her up ... in what she’s wantin’, mate … She’s doin’ things ... how she’s wantin’ to do ‘em … I ain’t interferin’ much … [so] long she’s feelin’ good doin’ things her way, know what I mean? (Ben)

I feel, um – Steve’s a good head on his shoulders … In some ways, um – I feel he’s probably more life-experience than me? … He’s very good at deciding his best moves … [with] his clients and proposals ... [that'll] benefit him the most ... I’d say, um – I really leave him alone to ... decide what he wants to do for himself … I feel, um – I’d say, most of the time … I’m happy to support him ... [with] what makes him happy ... That’s my aim. (Rachel) [emphasis on partner-focused subjective goodness]

Expanding on the aforesaid point, I contend that two main evaluative routes define interviewees’ altruistic supports of partners’ subjective goodness.\footnote{Once more, any semblances of ‘good’ here and elsewhere imply a wide range of positive notions – not necessarily expressed by interviewees as ‘goodness’ in itself.} First, they wish for beloveds to recognise themselves as generally ‘good persons’. This ‘existentially broad’ evaluation is thus not limited to specific situations, but rather, centres on their estimations of whether partners are self-assessing their overall identities in constantly ‘bettering’ terms (e.g. optimising self-experiences, building self-esteem, increasingly embodying various positive virtues, qualities, etc.). For instance, Dan earnestly hopes for Jane to value herself as a “kind human being” who progressively acknowledges her own goodness “much more … [than] how she does now”. Other interviewees convey similar altruistic feelings:

Sometimes, like – I reckon, Jack puts others before him … way too much and all that, ya know? … He kinda doesn’t give himself enough credit for … [being] super patient with … his troublemaker friends … [and] his kinda annoying brother and sis … I wish, like – I wish he’s kinda learns to be a bit … less hard on himself ... [and] see himself in a better light and all that. (Fiona)

She ain’t shy sayin’ she’s smart … Most times I ain’t got any problems … with her havin’ some slight ego, mate … [The] more she’s knowin’ she’s smarter ... than most dumbass folks ... the more she’s feelin’ good on herself ... I’m all for it, mate … I ain’t havin’ any issues with her … goin’ ‘bout like that. (Ben)

I’d say, um, Steve’s very self-aware … He really knows, um – he knows what he’s like as a person … He’s very good at … understanding parts of himself … he wants to improve in … I guess I really feel, um – I really want him to ... feel he’s growing as a person … [and] feel he’s

115
improving … in the right ways he wants. (Rachel) [emphasis on partners’ subjective goodness in terms of overall self-identities]

A second evaluative route relates to interviewees’ wantings for beloveds to become accumulatively ‘good at’ a diverse range of specific activities / practices (i.e. not just applied to broad personhood) – again, based on their own subjective standards. For instance, Fiona often shares her happiness at watching Jack “legit improve in his surfing … [and] seeing him push his competitive side”. Through paying nurturing heed to what “he sees he’s super good at”, her own altruistic feelings are affirmed. Dan, Ben, and Rachel’s accounts resonate:

I honestly think Jane’s … doing just a fantastic job … [with] her vegan outreach program … She’s just recruited a new team to help her … [and] I think, yeah – they’ve just converted a lot of new people over to our side … Honestly, I think – end of the day, she’s just fantastic at spreading the message … [and] I think, yeah – I think she feels she’s doing good work – important work … [that] matters deeply to her … She’s my full, whole-hearted support. (Dan)

Sarah’s playin’ in this band, down in our area … They’ve got couple proper shows done – couple comin’ up … They’re gettin’ proper momentum goin’, mate … Her singin’ – it ain’t half bad, mate – she’s proper good! … She’s knowin’ she’s gettin’ better … [the] more their practicin’ … I’m happy seein’ her enjoynin’ herself … makin’ proper music … she’s proud to make. (Ben)

Steve’s only started with forex trading … He’s really reading up heaps, learning a lot … I’d say, I really like him telling me … [about] the progress he’s making … I’m, um – I’m really glad … he thinks he’s progressing really well … [and that] he’s glad with his own discipline … [and] results he’s getting. (Rachel) [emphasis on partners’ self-accessed goodness at various activities / practices]

For the most part, interviewees see their altruisms as being primarily focused on partners – not themselves. However, on a realistic level, such experiences do seem to involve a subtle degree of self-concern. Specifically, I interpret their ‘betterment’ supports tend to be more pronounced when they perceive greater similarities between partners’ and their own contextual definitions of subjective goodness. By contrast, too many felt differences may in some cases slightly diminish – but seldom fully deplete – their altruistic feelings. For example, Ben describes his

---

149 Strictly speaking, wider societal definitions are also at play – in that partners’ subjective goodness valuations of various activities / practices are often meaningfully linked to established performative rules / gauges. For instance, Jack’s dream to become a competitive surfer is partly based on his self-accessed goodness at the sport, but also rises from his goals to meet the ‘objective’ standards of professional guidelines, rankings, etc. Nonetheless, the main experiential point here lies with interviewees’ idiographic foci on partners’ personal assessments (i.e. if he / she feels he is becoming ‘better’) – less so with how such assessments are formed in relation to expansive sedimented measurements.

150 There are of course exceptions to this rule – particularly during times where interviewees may vehemently disagree with partners on certain issues, situations, etc. For instance, Ben stands steadfast against “Sarah’s party drug use” despite her believing this to be a ‘good’ habit to “help her relax and shit”. To this end, interviewees’ altruisms may be largely withheld in contexts where they sense an extreme mismatch with beloveds’ subjective goodness definitions.
complimentary beliefs with Sarah in “goin’ big … or goin’ home … in anythin’ we’re keen on doin’”. He thus wholeheartedly professes his backing for her in situations where she adopts this 'good' attitude akin to his own (e.g. "believin’ in her … all the way" when she strongly pushes a work agenda to her colleagues, etc.). Meanwhile, Ben is more reserved in declaring his support for Sarah when “she’s bein’ too nice to folks … [whom] I’m thinkin’ ain’t deservin’ to be nice to”. Nonetheless, even with his personal disagreements, he ultimately expresses his continued – albeit slightly hesitant – wishes for her to “do whatever’s makin’ her feel good”. Other interviewees echo the same habits:

Yeah, Jane’s saying the other day … [that] she’s excited to … experience what a real missionary trip’s like … I think, yeah – she’s probably heading to … somewhere in South Africa … She says she wants to be … a more proactive Christian … Honestly, I just told her, “yeah, just go for it!” … I’m totally with her … I think it’s just fantastic! … I’d go myself … [if] I didn’t have … a flood of work holding me down. (Dan) [emphasis on heightened altruisms via similar goodness definitions]

I reckon Jack – like, he spends way, way too much time gyming and all that … Like, okay – he does look better from going … [but] like, I reckon there’s better ways to spend his time, ya know? … I’ve told him this … He disagrees … Like, he says he feels good getting fitter … [so] I’m going – okay, ya know, I think he’s still addicted and overdoing stuff … [but] so long he’s pleased, that’s great … I’m pleased he’s pleased. (Fiona) [emphasis hints at diminished but still present altruisms amidst dissimilar goodness definitions]

Um, I’d say – I really felt slightly worried … [when] Steve first started forex [trading] … He was putting in … um, a fair bit of his savings? … I mean, um – I support him trying … [but] I was feeling maybe … he should keep his risk low? … He’s better now though … As in, I really feel he’s very careful these days … He’s putting in only small amounts now … I’d say, I really feel, um – I’ve a clearer conscience … encouraging him – as in, now that he’s not too extreme anymore. (Rachel) [emphasis on increasing altruism in relation to gradually aligning goodness definitions]

Interviewees’ altruisms are shaped by their beliefs that partners’ betterments can occur via both ‘external’ and ‘self-related’ factors. ‘External’ factors are those thought by them to fall figuratively outside of their spheres of immediate influence. For example, Rachel describes Steve’s recent job promotion as “something I feel he really … worked so hard for” – also partly attained “thanks to the previous guy who quit”. She does not attribute any of this favourable outcome to anything she personally did (i.e. it is ‘external’ to her input). However, it is important to note that, despite her externality, she still expresses a persistent sense of “feeling happy … he’s happy with his work progress”. Put simply, Rachel’s altruisms towards Steve’s subjective goodness remains affirmed,

151 Hence, external altruism is usually observational, with interviewees regarding themselves as still supportive of partners’ betterments, even without any direct influence on their parts.
despite her independence from this specific situation. Dan, Fiona, and Ben disclose congruent experiences:

I think, yeah, she recently … just made amends with Denise [an old friend] … Honestly, I don’t know much of what happened … between those two … I wasn’t directly involved … End of the day, yeah – honestly. I’m just glad … she’s just feeling much better … after working things out … I think it’s good to … see them clear the air … with each other. (Dan)

Jack’s started his own YouTube channel … He does mostly sports and fitness stuff and all that … Ya know, I, like – I offered to help him shoot [his videos] … [but] he says he prefers filming them on his own … [so] I haven’t touched anything … I reckon, like – ya know, he’s seriously gaining lotsa subscribers pretty fast! … I’m super happy … [and] excited for him! (Fiona)

I ain’t knowin’ how to help her … [with] her music … I’m shit useless in music … It’s all her, mate … They [Sarah and her band] gone on to win some competition, few weeks back … I’m fuckin’ proud of her, mate! … If she’s ever tellin’ me she’s wantin’ to go full-time … she’s my full backin’ … I’m enjoyin’ watchin’ … her kick proper ass … [and] gettin’ bigger. (Ben)

Concurrently, interviewees’ recognise their own ‘self-related’ capacities for inspiring partners’ betterments (i.e. within their sphere of influence). For instance, Ben considers Sarah’s current talents at “doin’ things once … [and] doin’ shit right” to be a direct result of his moral encouragements. Meanwhile, Dan suggests Jane’s “delight … [in] saving her money better” is partly due to his first-hand financial advice. Fiona and Rachel share similar opinions:

Jack used to be all shy … [with] letting his freak-flag fly, ya know? … He’s actually super funny … [but] I reckon, like – he used to be … super self-conscious and stuff … I kinda helped him … [by] teaching him, like – it’s, like, totally fine being a bit weird and off the wall, ya know? … Like, now he’s so much better … [at] loving to be himself and all that … He’s much more easy-going. (Fiona)

I’d say, I feel, um – I’m really quite good at maybe … asking people the real questions they really want to be asked? … As in, I’m good at feeling out … their main concerns, how they’re feeling … Steve’s picked it up too … [from] watching me with my friends … I really feel he’s … very good with his intuition now … probably, um – I’d say, a little thanks to me? … He says he’s really better at … figuring his clients out. (Rachel) [emphasis suggests self-related altruism]

Interestingly, interviewees admit that not all of their self-related altruisms are greeted by partners in a positive light – at least, not initially. For example, Fiona once encouraged Jack to “not chill

---

152 Whilst external altruism is vicarious, interviewees self-related supports are generally more action-oriented towards beloveds (e.g. interactions, intentions, gestures, etc.).

153 This experiential theme is reminiscent of interpersonal chemistry (as discussed in the previous chapter) since it involves stirring changes in partners. However, whilst chemistry entails mutual two-way reactions, self-related altruism focuses on moments where interviewees place a skewed priority on inspiring beloveds’ betterments, not so much their own.
with Mark [Jack’s friend] too much … [because] like, I reckon – he’s not a good influence on him”. However, her well-meaning support was met with some unhappiness, since “I reckon he wasn’t too pleased … I pointed it out … [and] he thought I was … being too judgy and stuff”. Nonetheless, Fiona still considers this and other similar instances as being ultimately altruistic154, insofar as: 1) she sees herself as genuinely motivated to help her partner better his own subjective goodness (e.g. less spurred by her own personal dislike of Mark, and more so to aid Jack with keeping healthier company), and 2) any early negative reactions from her beloved are felt by her to eventually subside into willing – rather than coerced – agreement (e.g. Jack came to recognise Mark as a bad influence that indeed inhibits his personal growth).155 Fiona is not alone in such benevolent leanings:

“Few weeks back – I think I just told her – look, she should try to manage her time better … Way I see it, I think there’s times she’s … taking on too many things at once … [and] I just honestly want to help … She wasn’t happy … at what I said at first … [but] I think, honestly, she saw I meant well … I think – yeah, she’s taken what I said onboard … [and] she’s definitely more active in … managing her time better. (Dan)

“Mate, I ain’t got nothin’ but proper intentions … [when] I’m tellin’ Sarah, “Stop hoardin’ shit!” … She’s fillin’ her room with … fuckin’ junk … It’s pilin’ up, mate … She went ape-shit on me … [but] after calmin’ down, she’s tellin’ me I’m right … [so] now she’s startin’ to clear her shit out. (Ben)

Um, I really don’t pry into Steve’s … relationship with his brother … [but] the other day, I really, really felt they had a huge miscommunication … I advised him to, um – I guess – maybe try to work things out? … I really only wanted to support him … Steve, um – I’d say, he was a little defensive initially … [because] he felt I was misreading the whole situation … Luckily, um – he decided to listen to me … He called his brother up … [and] I guess he’s happy he did … [because] I really feel it was a huge misunderstanding. (Rachel) [emphasis on the aforesaid conditions of self-related altruism]156

Interviewees’ altruisms are partly fostered via their general gauges of partners’ mental well-beings.157 These gauges seem to take on three main contextual forms. The first centres on instances where they may see partners as feeling temporarily downtrodden (i.e. impoverished from what

---

154 These kinds of experiences appear slightly less ‘altruistic’ in the most formal sense of the word – to the degree interviewees are partly asserting their own subjective goodness definitions over those of partners (albeit with well-meaning intentions).

155 On the flipside, a self-perceived absence in either or both of these conditions may make Fiona – along with other interviewees – feel too ‘pushy’ or ‘bossy’, causing them to question the sincerity of their altruisms.

156 Interviewees differed in their willingness to voice their potentially disagreeable views to beloveds. For instance, Ben seems to do so more often than Rachel, who tends to be more ‘hands-off’ with Steve. Regardless, all of them believe such views (when they are aired) remain altruistic, to the extent the two mentioned conditions are met.

157 Esoterically, well-beingness is a complex and often nebulous concept (Dodge et al. 2012). However, I use the term here to loosely refer to interviewees’ senses of partners’ broad cognitive states (i.e. in terms of their overall moods, mindsets, temperaments, feelings, etc.).
they deem to be beloveds’ ‘normal’ levels of well-beingness\(^{158}\). During such occasions, they commonly regard their altruisms as actions that may partly assist with uplifting partners’ negative moods, mindsets, etc. Rachel, for example, describes Steve’s deep sadness shortly after his father’s passing. This in turn motivated her own altruistic desires to “talk with him … [and] lift his spirits up, maybe a little”:

Steve – he, um – he really took it very hard … I really felt I needed to be there … [to] really listen and talk to him … I, um – I wanted to help him feel better, as hard as it was … I wanted to … help him heal … [and] lift him back up … on his feet again. (Rachel) [emphasis on uplifting altruism amidst impoverished well-beingness]

A second contextual form entails moments when partners seem to be within the aforementioned ‘normal’ states. To this end, interviewees tend to view any altruistic deeds they might offer as capable of further elevating partners into ‘above average’ conditions of well-beingness (e.g. inspiring exceptionally positive feelings, etc.). Ben gives a broad example:

Other day, Sarah and I – we’re out shoppin’ … [and] she’s bein’ her usual self – ain’t no drama … Suddenly I’m surprisin’ her … [by] bringin’ her to … some fancy dinner place … She’s all big smiles, mate! … Really cheerin’ up her day … I’m always surprisin’ her … [with] things she ain’t expectin’ … hopin’ to make happy. (Ben) [emphasis on altruistic elevations above normal levels of well-beingness]

The third contextual form involves instances where partners are already feeling elated. In such welcomed cases, interviewees usually value their altruisms as a means of maintaining beloveds’ heightened well-beings.

Jack’s gets super pumped, super excited … [on] most of his [surf] training days … I reckon, like – I love heading to the beach with him … [and] be, like, his cheerleader and all, cheering him on … I like keeping his spirits up and all that … I reckon, like – he likes the added motivation. (Fiona) [emphasis on altruistic maintenance of heightened well-beingness]

The above contexts are experientially distinct from each other. However, there is a common thread running through all of them – namely, interviewees implicit habits of mostly seeing their altruisms as motivating forces that move partners’ well-beings ‘up’ along a figurative qualitative scale (i.e. ‘up’ is positive, ‘down’ is negative).\(^{159}\) This taken-for-granted ‘verticality’ largely compels them

\(^{158}\) Of course, what this ‘normal’ condition is varies greatly, based on each interviewee’s respective experiences with his / her beloved. For instance, Ben regards Sarah as “usually fiery” whilst Fiona generally sees Jack as his “normal goofy self”. Nonetheless, these evaluations are unified by their inferences of partners’ most prevalent (i.e. ‘normal’) state – that is, how they are like ‘most often’ on a day-to-day basis.

\(^{159}\) Not all altruistic expressions are latently linked to figurative verticality. For instance, Fiona also describes her support of Jack as “lighting a fire under him” (i.e. sensorial correlation) whilst Ben believes his motivations “energise the hell outta her” (i.e. imagined force vibrations).
to creatively express their altruistic supports in subliminally directional terms (e.g. ‘uplifting’, ‘cheering up’, ‘keeping up spirits’, etc.).\(^{160}\) Dan’s descriptions further verify this:

Honesty, when Jane’s feeling down … I think, yeah – I usually try to raise her mood up a little … I usually suggest we watch a movie … [or] go for a walk … Gestures like that – I think, yeah – that’s just my way of showing her I care. (Dan) [emphasis on ‘upwards’ altruism]

Interviewees often associate their altruisms with particular ongoing / upcoming situations.\(^{161}\) These situations include, for example, Jane’s nearing “missionary journey” (Dan), Jack’s “super fun video project” (Fiona), Sarah’s “mini [music] album release” (Ben), and Steve’s “big meeting with sponsors” (Rachel), amongst myriad others. As readers can tell, such situations are very diverse in nature. However, all of them share two common experiential qualities, namely: 1) interviewees’ desires for each distinct situation to be resolved in ways that stimulate beloveds’ betterments,\(^{162}\) and 2) their wishes for each resolution to potentially lead to further beneficial situations for partners (thus inviting for more altruistic acts).\(^{163}\) As illustrated by Ben and Rachel:

Her big [album] release’s comin’ up, mate … She’s proper excited! … I ain’t got no idea how thing’s … turnin’ out … [but] I’m crossin’ my fingers, mate! … I’m hopin’ her launch’s goin’ smooth for her … [and] she’s gettin’ a proper kick from it … Ain’t knowin’ what’s comin’ from it … [but] I’m hopin’ her album’s gonna get … more folks excited and listenin’ … and ravin’ ‘bout her … She’s got my full backin’ all the way, mate, whatever’s happenin’. (Ben)

Steve’s meeting up with some interested sponsors … I really pray … they’re keen to get onboard … I really feel, um – I feel it’ll be a huge payoff – I mean, for his hard work … I feel it’ll open heaps of doors for him … Um, well – I’m pretty clueless on the details … [but] I’m rooting … everything’ll turn out really well … for his meeting … [and] everything after. (Rachel) [emphasis highlights the two aforesaid qualities of situational altruism]

Like attraction, interviewees mostly perceive their altruisms in both ‘physical’ and ‘emotional’ ways – albeit much more discreetly.\(^{164}\) Of the first action-oriented category, Fiona, for instance, stresses the importance of actually “taking time to … follow Jack on [video] shoots … [as] he does

---

\(^{160}\) In addition, interviewees appear to associate partners’ rising mental conditions with increased subjective goodness alignments (i.e. as well-being improves, so too do partners’ personal strivings for betterment).

\(^{161}\) This occurs alongside their broad – that is, less situationally specific – desires for partners to lead constantly bettering lives on the whole (i.e. as increasingly ‘good’ persons who are also progressively ‘good at’ the activities / practices that interest them).

\(^{162}\) For interviewees, these resolutions may be due to external and / or self-related factors – both of which contribute to their altruistic feelings.

\(^{163}\) As noted at the start of Part B, such future-oriented imaginings affect, and are affected by, interviewees’ reflections on past / present experiences, indicating cyclical meaning-making processes.

\(^{164}\) Unlike attraction, interviewees seldom directly use the words ‘physical’ and ‘emotional’ when expressing their altruistic acts. Nonetheless, many of their descriptions still seem implicitly reliant on this Cartesian-esque duality (e.g. talking about their altruistic bodily actions in a slightly different manner than their supportive thoughts, etc.).
his thing” (i.e. physical altruistic support). The second cognitive category is exemplified when Dan talks about the “positive feelings … [and] moral support” he has for Jane’s veganism campaign – even as he is careful not to “tag along too much … [and] stick my head in … where it isn’t wanted” (i.e. mostly emotional altruism). Ben and Rachel’s encouragements also tacitly abide to similar conceptual divisions:

The other day … I’m goin’ with Sarah … [to] the old folks place … helpin’ her out, handin’ out food … [and] doin’ heavy liftin’ … If most normal folks askin’ me [for help], I’m tellin’ them “Bugger off!” … [But] for her – I ain’t mindin’ goin’ down, helpin’ her out, mate … It’s my pleasure. (Ben) [emphasis on physical altruism]

Um, I’d say – I really don’t know Steve’s brother … all too well? … As in, um – I really haven’t seen him in years … [but] I really make a point to listen … [and] lend my full ear, my full support … [when] Steve’s sharing with me … his issues with him … I, um – I really try to give good advice … [and] take his side … [even though] I don’t go with Steve … to meet Dave [his brother]. (Rachel) [emphasis on emotional altruism]

Yet, amidst this subtle duality, interviewees regularly proclaim their readiness to offer partners’ both their physical and emotional cares – should situations call for it.¹⁶⁵ That is to say, for them, it is important to appropriately express¹⁶⁶ their supports via actions and thoughts – a holistic condition that shapes their epistemic valuations of being ‘truly’ altruistic. Dan articulates this most clearly:

I think, yeah – I express my emotional support … End of the day, I think that’s extremely important to her … [but] honestly, just nice words – I don’t think that cuts it … Way I see it, actions just speak louder than words … I think I do … step up to the plate … to show her I care, not just say it … I think that’s me showing real concern. (Dan) [emphasis on holistic ‘true’ altruism]

Interviewees ‘true’ altruisms are also reconciled with self-authenticity. I previously explored how this broad notion is partly based on their senses of matching their ‘internal’ reflections with ‘outward’ expressions. Thus, transposed to this context, I suggest interviewees are most likely to judge their altruistic acts as ‘real’ insofar as they are felt to stem from genuine (not acted or

---

¹⁶⁵ Such situations include, for instance, Rachel’s past aims to be physically present with Steve to give him emotional support after his father’s passing – or Ben’s physical attendance at Sarah’s live shows as a clear sign of his emotional encouragement.

¹⁶⁶ To interviewees, there are certain situations where expressing both styles of altruism may not be necessary – for instance, Dan’s belief that his ‘physical’ support might inadvertently get in the way of Jane’s campaign ongoings. However, the key word here is readiness – in that interviewees must feel consistently willing to offer holistic actionable / cognitive backing should circumstances call for it (e.g. Jane suddenly requires Dan’s additional physical aid).
surfaceful) concerns for partners’ betterments. Put simply, any conveyed supports for beloveds must largely correspond with their inner intents in order for such experiences to be authentically affirmed.

She’s seein’ plenty of fakers, mate … Most folks sayin’ they got her back … [but] ain’t livin’ up to it … I’m always makin’ it my point – if I’m thinkin’ on doin’ somethin’ for her, I do it … No qualms, mate … I ain’t one of ‘em fake folks … bein’ all half-hearted, sayin’ things but ain’t really wantin’ to do them. (Ben)

I reckon, ya know – like, sometimes Jack’s pissing me off … [so] I’m, like – I’m too annoyed at his stupid face … He knows me, like – he knows when I’m not feeling it, I’m not in the mood to help, ya know? … [But] I reckon, like – ninety-nine percent – I’m feeling involved … [and] I’m ready to help him, for reals. (Fiona) [emphasis on self-authentic altruism]

Just as interviewees aim to feel ‘true’ to their own altruisms, so too do they seek for partners to modestly acknowledge the legitimacy of their expressed supports. Specifically, they aspire to be seen by beloveds as concerned and well-meaning persons who honestly care for their betterments.

In the strictest sense, it is possible to argue that these aspirations branch from hidden egoisms and / or self-interested wishes to gain personal statuses as positively-valued altruistic persons (Gantt & Reber 1999). This may admittedly be the case – to a partial extent. However, I believe their intentions to convey their ‘true’ altruisms are, for the most part, meant to reassure partners that they are faithfully present to assist them in their pursuits of subjective goodness (i.e. they are never existentially alone).

Honesty, I don’t recall … too many times … I’ve ever refused to help Jane … I dunno, the way I see it, I think … for me, it’s just important to let her know … she can count on me … [to] always have … her best interest at heart … I realise early on – I think it’s just important … she knows … I’m always supporting her, thick and thin. (Dan)

As discussed earlier, there are moments where interviewees may not fully agree with partners’ subjective goodness definitions. However, in such cases, any hesitantly given altruistic supports are still deemed by them to be ‘true’ – on the condition they remain overarchingly motivated by sincere desires to aid beloveds’ betterments, despite differing opinions.

Of course, interviewees do show some signs of self-interest amidst their altruisms. For instance, Ben admits to “feelin’ good on myself” whenever he assists Sarah, whilst Rachel derives security from knowing “Steve really values me … [and] what I do for him”. Yet, rather than subscribing to a reductive either / or dichotomy of ‘egoism / altruism’, I suggest Flescher & Worthen’s flexible exposition is far more appropriate here. They assert:

… the possibility that altruistic motivation is compatible with certain forms of self-interested motivation, as long as it can be established that the welfare of the other is truly an end in itself rather than merely a means to a self-interested end. (2007, p. 83)

This less stringent definition better captures the lived fluidity of interviewees’ altruisms. Indeed, even amidst allusions to self-interest, I interpret they are largely (but again, not entirely) inclined to treat partners’ betterments as ends in themselves, from which any personal benefits are fortunate perks of —not the sole intent behind — their altruistic acts.
Um, I really feel – as in, he really likes to handle … a lot of things on his own … [but] I try to really show him … he doesn’t need to … juggle ten different things alone? … I guess, I’d say, I, um – I really want him to really feel … I’m with him, always. (Rachel) [emphasis on partner-focused reassurances of ‘true’ altruism]

Interviewees’ altruisms are specifically directed towards partners’ individualities – but are at the same time valued as a broader quality of their shared relationships. In particular, they imply that the more ‘truly’ caring they are towards beloveds, the more likely such forthright benevolence will be reciprocated.\(^{169}\) This authentic reciprocity in turn compels them to see their ‘boundaried’ bonds as generally defined by mutual wants for each other’s betterments (i.e. an altruistic partnership).

Mate, us – we got good days … [and] shit days – ain’t no different from most folks … [but] what we’re good for – we got a carin’ relationship … I ain’t holdin’ myself back … from carin’ for her … [and] she ain’t holdin’ back … havin’ an eye out for me … We’re both knowin’ we got … somethin’ proper solid goin’ on. (Ben)

Ya know, like – lotsa people – they don’t really see us … as, like, a serious couple, ya know? … We come off as kinda self-indulgent and stuff … Actually, I reckon, like, our relationship – we’re actually … pretty selfless to each other … We legit, like, encourage each other a lot … I reckon – it’s one of the good bits of our relationship … I never had that, like, in my past and stuff – not like this. (Fiona) [emphasis highlights altruism as a relationship characteristic]

Altruism is most frequently experienced by interviewees as an active (rather than reticent) form of support.\(^{170}\) Here, activity entails their self-initiatives in expressing their steadfast encouragements (physically and / or emotionally) to beloveds – as opposed to passively ‘sitting back’ and waiting to be asked for assistance / assurance. Rachel explains:

I really feel, um – in our relationship … I choose to be proactive … [in] expressing that I care … If I only keep to myself all the time … [and] I never choose … [to] offer any support … I’d say, um – I’ll really come across as very, uh, self-centered? … Maybe he’ll feel I’m very – uh, maybe, I’m not caring enough? … [So] I really try … [to] actively express my support … [in] what he’s doing … as much as I can. (Rachel) [emphasis on active altruism]

**Empathy** is a crucial aspect of interviewees’ altruisms.\(^{171}\) In our present context, I propose this experiential category is broadly predicated on their cognitive efforts to ‘put themselves in beloveds’ shoes’. This involves creative attempts to grasp partners’ unique individualities (including accumulated experiences, feelings, beliefs, views, etc.) as they try their best to envision

\(^{169}\) Chapter 11 for more on this super-ordinate theme.

\(^{170}\) Interviewees may occasionally be passive in their altruisms – for instance, when Fiona is too unhappy with Jack to want to support him. However, such reticent moments tend to only be temporary. To this end, active altruism for interviewees lies with practicing it in a predominant (but not necessarily unwavering) fashion. On the other hand, extended failures to maintain this predominance may in some cases lead to ‘unideal’ moments of ‘being in love’ (see Chapter 12).

\(^{171}\) For detailed phenomenological explorations of empathy, see Baillie (1996), Svenaeus (2016), and Zahavi (2001).
what various unfolding situations would feel like through beloveds’ eyes – not simply their own. Doing so partly veers their interpretations away from ‘what I want my partner to want’ to ‘what I think my partner wants’172 – the latter of which better aligns with their altruistic goals to understand partners’ subjective goodness definitions.

Sarah’s been wantin’ to go … to some self-help seminar … I hate those fuckin’ money-grubbin’ talks, mate … [but] I’m knowin’ she’s real keen to go … I’m makin’ time understandin’ things her way … I’m seein’ how she’s findin’ … some good from them … I’m knowin’ she’s got issues in the past … she’s wantin’ to resolve … I’m tellin’ her – those talks are fuckin’ shit … [but] I’m also sayin’ to her … I’m supportin’ her wantin’ … [to] take somethin’ from them. (Ben)

Like, I reckon Jack pushes his [surf] training hard … [because] he’s kinda, like – he wants to prove something to the world and stuff … To me – I reckon, he’s more than good enough … as he is, ya know? … [But] I kinda, like – I get his feelings too … He’s kinda had lotsa people look down on him – his dad especially … [so] I legit, like – I get where he’s comin’ from and stuff … My big thing’s – like, I’m happy to do anything I can … [to] help him achieve his dreams and stuff. (Fiona) [emphasis on empathy with regards to altruism]

Interviewees’ experience the value of their altruisms in two overlapping ways. First, they are wont to regard any genuine deed towards beloveds as possessing inherent value-in-itself (i.e. appreciated on its own terms, requiring no further explanation). For example, Dan expresses how “just looking out for Jane” is simply a “right thing to do … [as] her partner” (i.e. intrinsically ‘right’, as it is).

Other interviewees share similar assumptions, albeit assigning varied essential worths:

I motivate Jack cause, like – I reckon, that’s good, right? … Like, why else would I motivate him? (Fiona)

Mate, it’s a noble thing … always havin’ my lady’s back … Ain’t needin’ no better reason. (Ben)

I care for his well-being … I’d say, um – well, I just do. (Rachel) [emphasis on value-in-itself altruism]

Interviewees simultaneously regard their altruisms as value-added.173 Specifically, each supportive act is thought to meaningfully contribute beyond itself towards the wider purpose of enhancing (i.e. value-adding) beloveds’ overall self-experiences.174 Dan’s remarks sum this up:

---

172 Again, these types of imaginings inescapably occur amidst interviewees’ self-experiences, and thus, can never be fully free from their own habitus.

173 Akin to other themes, it is mildly (but not entirely) contradictive for interviewees to deem their altruisms as at once value-in-itself and value-added. Yet, once more, such valuations are flexibly imaginative, not fastidiously logical.

174 These enhancements happen in many ways, some of which have already been discussed throughout this chapter (e.g. partners’ progressive goodness-orientations, heightened well-beingness, positive outcomes that may produce further beneficial situations, etc.).
End of the day, I think, yeah – *every small support I give her* … I just honestly hope *everything leads to* … *[her]* becoming *more confident in herself* … *happier* … *[and]* ready to chase her *dreams* … I just want to help … *[if]* it means I’m somehow … doing that for her, as her partner. (Dan) [emphasis on value-added altruism]

I have thus far discussed a few prominent experiential qualities shaping interviewees’ altruisms amidst their ‘ideal’ moments of ‘being in love’. Let us now uncover the possible image schemas that both facilitate and delimit their embodied meanings.

### 10.2. Image Schemas of Altruism

Like other super-ordinate themes, interviewees’ altruisms are experientially flourished by a composite of image schemas – some of which I will explore here. For starters, I posit their contextual notions of ‘betterment’ are discreetly reliant on creative extensions of CONTAINER and SCALE. CONTAINER enables them to see beloveds as ‘boundaried’ conscious individuals (i.e. **A PERSON IS A CONTAINER**) with their own *categorically contained* definitions of subjective goodness (i.e. mental **CATEGORIES ARE CONTAINERS**). Concurrently, SCALE is crucial to their readings of partners’ processual increases or improvements in being qualitatively ‘good’ / ‘good at’ something (i.e. bettering). In effect, none of these conceptions would be meaningfully organised as how they are if not for the patterning logics that underlie them.

I just have a lot of faith in her … *She’s just getting better at … what she loves to do* [with her veganism campaign] … I just sense – I think, yeah – she’s saying *she’s more and more happy* with … *[what] she’s doing*. (Dan) [emphasis on **A PERSON IS A CONTAINER** / qualitative SCALE increase in mentally **CONTAINED** definitions of ‘happiness’ (valued as good)]

*She’s feelin’ she’s improvin’ … *[in] her confidence … in her live shows, mate … Ain’t surprisin’ she’s got fans!* (Ben) [emphasis on **A PERSON IS A CONTAINER** / growing SCALE of **CONTAINED** ‘confidence’ (again, seen as good)]

The **A PERSON IS A CONTAINER** metaphor also frames interviewees’ senses of their own subjective goodness being *physically / cognitively distinct* from those of partners. At the same time, **MATCHING** subtends their creative abilities to discern degrees of *interpersonal similarities (or differences)* in definitions.

*Me and Steve – um, I really feel … *we both really agree … trying to be happy’s really the most important thing … We’ve really **similar** feelings on this.* (Rachel)

---

175 In this case, interviewees discreet usages of **CATEGORIES ARE CONTAINERS** are heavily focused on their imaginings of partners’ (and not merely their own) cognitively distinct definitions.
I reckon, like – *he and I’ve different* ideas of success, ya know? … *We don’t have the same* views … Like, he’s less into making money and stuff like that … I’m *different* – I, like – I reckon, money’s a means to an end for me, ya know? (Fiona) [emphasis on *A PERSON IS A CONTAINER / (MIS)MATCHES in subjective goodness*)

**CENTRE-PERIPHERY** is another key structure latent to stirring interviewees’ altruistic experiences.

Explaining this image schema, Johnson suggests:

> The fact of our physical embodiment gives a very definite character to our perceptual experience. Our world radiates out from *our bodies* as perceptual centers from which we see, hear, touch, taste, and smell our world … At a certain distance from this perceptual center our world ‘fades off’ into a perceptual horizon which no longer presents us with discrete objects … What I have just described is the contour of the **CENTER-PERIPHERY** schema [see Figure 5 below]. The center-point represents my perceptual and experiential center which defines my experiential space and fades off into my horizon (wavy line) (1987, p. 124).

![Figure 5: CENTRE-PERIPHERY image schema (Johnson 1987, p. 124)](image)

As with any embodied pattern, our natural imaginative extensions of **CENTRE-PERIPHERY** ensure that “it shows itself not only in the structure of my perceptual field but [is] equally important as a structure of my social, economic, political, religious, and philosophical world” (Johnson 1987, p. 125). This schema also allows us to reflect on how “some things, events, and persons … loom larger in my experience and are more central to my interactions … [whilst] others are relatively peripheral at a given point in time” (Johnson 1987, p. 124).

From the above, I postulate that interviewees’ provisions of self-related and external altruisms are intimately tied up with **CENTRE-PERIPHERY**. Specifically, they usually conceive the former as a form of *immediate* or *direct* personal impact (i.e. **CENTRAL** to their existential reach), with the latter occurring on their influential *fringes* (i.e. **PERIPHERY**) – albeit with beloveds’ well-beings remaining a **CENTRAL** mindful concern. Again, these rich imaginings may initially seem highly abstract – but are, on closer inspection, logically avowed by this schematic reasoning, without which any entailing meanings would be drastically altered.
I’m paying close attention … [to] helping her save money … I think, yeah – I’m just happy to … focus with her on … [the] best way to directly help her … sort everything out. (Dan) [emphasis on CENTRAL personal impact]

I ain’t doin’ much for her work troubles, mate … It’s outta my hands … I ain’t havin’ any reach … cause I ain’t directly involved … [But] most days, she comes home – first thing I’m wantin’ to know – “How’s work?” (Ben) [emphasis on PERIPHERAL influence / CENTRAL focus]

According to Johnson, “the removal of a barrier or the absence of some potential restraint is a structure of experience that we encounter daily” (1987, p. 46). The REMOVAL OF RESTRAINT schema thus relates to our body-based perceptions of an open path before us when “some actual barrier is removed … or because a potential barrier is not actually present” (Johnson 1987, p. 47). This is instanced “when the door is opened … [and] we are free to come into the room … [or] when the fence is taken away, the dog can visit its canine neighbors” (Johnson 1987, 46).

According to Johnson, “the removal of a barrier or the absence of some potential restraint is a structure of experience that we encounter daily” (1987, p. 46). The REMOVAL OF RESTRAINT schema thus relates to our body-based perceptions of an open path before us when “some actual barrier is removed … or because a potential barrier is not actually present” (Johnson 1987, p. 47). This is instanced “when the door is opened … [and] we are free to come into the room … [or] when the fence is taken away, the dog can visit its canine neighbors” (Johnson 1987, 46).

This same schema appears to subtly structure interviewees’ envisages of partners’ occasional scepticisms towards their altruisms. During such moments, they usually see their directed supports (i.e. CONSCIOUSNESS IS A PATH) as being met with initial hesitance (i.e. mental RESTRAINT). However, in many cases, this early obstinacy is felt to eventually recede into voluntary concordance (i.e. REMOVAL OF RESTRAINT, a figuratively open path for agreement). Ben and Rachel’s expressions exemplify this schematic dependency – from which we ourselves are able to comprehend them due to our shared exposures to this recurring pattern:

Mate, she’s stubborn as fuck sometimes … [when] she ain’t takin’ in anythin’ … [and] blockin’ me out … [But] most times, she’s soon seein’ … I’m only tryin’ to help, only meanin’ well … [then] she’s open to listenin’. (Ben)

Steve’s a very logical person … maybe, um – sometimes he’s too logical? … [So] I, uh – I really try to … get through to him … [to] maybe show him how … [to] see things more emotionally … I’d say, nowadays, uh – I feel he’s much … more open-minded to … try and balance himself. (Rachel) [emphasis on creative elaborations of REMOVAL OF RESTRAINT]
Our corporeal learnings of VERTICALITY – which include UP-DOWN orientations – are responsible for structuring “thousands of perceptions and activities we experience every day, such as perceiving a tree, our felt sense of standing upright … and experiencing the level of water rising in the bathtub” (Johnson 1987, p. xiv). In such respects, I believe interviewees’ altruisms are partly derivative of MORE IS UP (Johnson 1987, p. 121) – a schematic metaphor that, in the first place, allows them to imaginatively correlate their increased (i.e. MORE) care with beloveds’ heightened (i.e. UPWARD) well-beings.176

I, like – I reckon I’m trying to encourage him … [as] much as I can … [to] upload more vids for his channel … I reckon his stuff’s great … [but] he’s not, like, super confident yet and all, ya know? … I’m hoping, like – the more I encourage him … the more he’ll keep up his motivation. (Fiona)

Steve’s – I’d say, um – he’s mostly very optimistic … [but] um, I really feel sometimes … he’s a little defeated, feels a bit down … I tend to really, um – I try to show more concern … [when] he’s in that mood … I mean, I feel I do … perk him up a little. (Rachel) [emphasis on non-literal entailments of VERTICALITY / MORE IS UP]

Interviewees’ judgments of altruism being value-in-itself and value-added are just as schematic. Here, CONTAINER seems to provide structuring coherency to their routines of seeing the inherent (i.e. self-CONTAINED) worth of their supportive acts. Meanwhile, PART-WHOLE is integral to building their impressions of each altruistic act (i.e. PART) leading to overall (i.e. WHOLE) improvements in interviewees’ self-experiences.

End of the day – I just think, yeah, caring for Jane … [is] just meaningful in its own right … Honestly, I don’t have … any intentions outside of … just wanting to … show her I care. (Dan) [emphasis on CONTAINED value-in-itself]

Every time I motivate Jack … I’m, like, I’m always hoping … he’ll be super inspired … [to] work hard … and, like, achieve his dreams … [so] he can be, like, all in all happier … and proud of himself, ya know?. (Fiona) [emphasis on value-added PART-WHOLE logic]

I have non-exhaustively shown how image schemas are quietly pivotal to interviewees’ biographical altruisms vis-à-vis their ‘ideal’ moments of ‘being in love’. Naturally, cultural meaning-templates are also involved.

---

176 GOOD IS UP (Lakoff & Johnson 1980a, p. 462) also seems to colour interviewees’ creative links between partners’ improving goodness-alignments and upkept well-beings.
10.3. Cultural Meaning-Templates of Altruism

Interviewees’ grasps of altruism (i.e. its semantic entailments) are not developed in isolation, but rather, partly reflect their largely unconscious learnings of long-standing cultural meaning-templates. To begin with, closely related notions on the need to show genuine ‘goodwill’ towards others can be traced back to the pioneering thoughts of Aristotle (Batson & Shaw 1991, p. 107) and other ancient Greeks (Gantt & Reber 1999, p. 14). Such ruminations were later evolved in varying ways by the likes of Aquinas, Hobbes, Bentham, Nietzsche, and Freud, amongst other key historical figures (Batson & Shaw 1991, p. 107). However, it is French sociologist Auguste Comte who is most often credited for first coining – and subsequently popularising – the actual term ‘altruism’ (Campbell 2006, p. 358; Gantt & Burton 2012, p. 439; Ricard 2015, p. 15). He broadly conceived the commitment to “live for others” (Comte 1858, p. 313) as “the definitive formula of human morality” (Comte 1858, p. 313), from which “altruism alone can enable us to live, in the highest and truest sense” (Comte 1858, p. 310). This core ideal was widely praised in major parts of the West throughout the 19th century, carried forward by George Henry Lewes, John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, and Frederic Harrison – to name but a few prominent persons (Keen 2016, n.p.). Popular Victorian novelists, such as George Elliot and Thomas Hardy, also “played a key role in the amplification of altruism even when they did not use the word themselves” (Keen 2016, n.p.)

Centuries later, Comte’s altruism is still widely assimilated (and debated) within Western cultures today (Flescher & Worthen 2007; Monroe 1996; Singer 2015). Most notably, the concept has more recently been expanded from its original macrosociological definition to become an important feature of micro-scale romantic partnerships (Batson 2011, p. 182-184; Maner & Gailliot 2006; Smith 2009).

As explained in a prior footnote, interviewees seldom directly referred to their actions as ‘altruistic’ – nor do they speak of ‘goodwill’ per se. Nonetheless, I interpret their many allusions to offering genuine care to beloveds are exceedingly – albeit unknowingly – evocative of key aspects of the above cultural meaning-template. For instance, Aristotle, in speaking of goodwill, famously suggests that “those who wish well to their friends for their sake are most truly friends; for they do this by reason of own nature and not incidentally” (1999, p. 130). He also declared “to be friends, then, the[y] must be mutually recognised as bearing goodwill and wishing well to each

\[177\] See Boehm (2012) and Domondon (2013) for historical overviews on the evolution of Western altruism.
other” (1999, p. 129). Keeping in mind interviewees’ treatments of friendship as a prime feature of ‘being in love’, I posit such handed-down Aristotelian ideals have tacitly propelled interviewees to view their own well-wishes towards beloveds as ‘natural’ qualities of their reciprocally benevolent bonds. Moreover, still-proliferated echoes of Comtean altruism seem to predispose them to discern their goodwill as a highly valued and ‘truly’ worthwhile moral impetus that manifests as sincere acts of service.

I think, for me – I just naturally want the best for her always … Honestly, I think that’s just … part of any good relationship. (Dan) [emphasis hints at Aristotelean ideals of goodwill]

I reckon, like, we’re super supportive of each other and stuff … That’s our big thing, ya know? (Fiona) [emphasis on the mutuality of Aristotelean goodwill]

Ain’t nothin’ more worth it … [than] carin’ for Sarah … She’s my pleasure, mate. (Ben) [emphasis highlights Comtean altruism as a favoured moral drive]

I feel, um – I try to be selfless … with Steve … as much as I can … I’d say, um – I really feel – as in, the two of us … we both really try … to look out for one another … I feel, um – that’s what being a real couple is about. (Rachel) [emphasis suggests Aristotelean / Comtean beliefs]

Altruism and empathy are also culturally entwined. According to Keen, Romantic and 18th century Sentimentalism-inspired discussions on ‘sympathy’ initially brought about the fresh emergence of a then “unlabelled empathetic element of Comtean altruism” (2016, n.p.). This element remained ambiguously referred to up until Einfühlung – “an old [German] concept that had been gaining new meaning and increased relevance from the 1870s onward” (Greiner 2016, n.p.) – was translated into “the word ‘empathy’ [that] first appeared in English in 1909” (Greiner 2016, n.p.). Amidst further semantic revisions, “an other-directed, affective application of empathy emerged in early twentieth-century psychology” (Keen 2016, n.p.) from which the pre-existing “empathy-shaped element [of altruism] could be filled in by the new term” (Keen 2016, n.p.). This conceptual linkage soon became commonplace (e.g. Batson et al. 1981; Cialdini et al. 1997; Fultz et al. 1986; Ricard 2015, p. 39-55) where “empathy is understood as a kind of feeling with the other … [and] can be used in terms of a sentimentalist account of explaining altruism” (Schramme 2017, p. 211). More recently, ‘empathy’ on its own remains “a hot topic these days” (Greiner 2016, n.p.) with vernacular meanings ranging “from benevolent, altruistic care” (Greiner 2016, n.p.) to

---

178 Refer to Wispé (1987) for a more nuanced account of Western historical developments of ‘empathy’.  

131
“feeling what someone else feels … caring about someone else … imagining oneself in another’s situation … [and] making inferences about another’s mental states” (Coplan 2011, p. 4).

This persistent cultural meaning-template of empathy has, in my opinion, inconspicuously impacted how interviewees apprehend their sincere supports towards partners. For example, they often express how their active concerns entail imagining ‘themselves as beloveds’ – an evaluation that hints at socially informed conflations of altruism and empathy. Moreover, these imaginings also see them trying to relate with partners’ life experiences, feelings, beliefs, etc. in ways strongly redolent of the aforesaid sedimented definitions of empathetic affinity. The following excerpts further reify these claims:

Honestly, yeah – I prefer not to assume too much … I just hear out her view … [and] feel how she’s thinking … [and] just help her … just from there. (Dan) [emphasis on empathy-attuned altruism]

Obviously, like – I reckon, Jack goes off-tangent and stuff … Like, the other day he was saying … he wants to start a new business … I’m like, okay – that’s a lot on his plate … Like, I want to support him … [but] ya know, I need to understand … where he’s coming from and stuff …. [and] why he, like – why he feels he needs to do this. (Fiona) [emphasis on altruism requiring empathy]

Times I’m rackin’ my brain … guessin’ Sarah’s feelin’ … why she’s bein’ some way … [and] where her head’s at … [because] I ain’t wantin’ to say some shit advice. (Ben) [emphasis on common notions of empathy]

I’d say, um – I really empathise with Steve … As in, um – I guess I’d be … heaps mad at my brother, too … if I was him. (Rachel) [emphasis on culturally-informed definition of empathy]

There are of course plenty more cultural meaning-templates not delineated here. Still, from what is provided, it is easy for readers to gleam how interviewees’ altruistic intentions towards beloveds are as much biographical / schematic as they are meaningfully instilled via environmental influences.

10.4. Conclusion

Interviewees’ shared experiences of altruism are indispensable to their ‘ideal’ conditions of ‘being in love’. This super-ordinate theme is prevailingly shaped by their: 1) sincere wishes for partners’ betterments – in terms of them being ‘as good as can be’ (i.e. improving, enhancing, etc.) across diverse contexts, 2) desires for beloveds to achieve their own subjective sense of ‘what is good’,
3) encouragements of partners to see themselves as generally good persons / good at various activities / practices, 4) increased altruistic supports that correspond with greater perceived similarities between both persons’ goodness definitions, 5) beliefs that beloveds’ betterments can occur via external and self-related factors, 6) feelings of partners’ occasional resistances against their supports. These supports are nonetheless still seen as altruistic insofar as they stem from genuine care and are accompanied by beloveds’ eventual agreements, 7) envisages of altruism as a figuratively uplifting force to partners’ well-beings, 8) associations with immediate / near-future situations that they hope will benefit beloveds’ in ways that lead to other positive circumstances, 9) regards of physical (i.e. action-oriented) and emotional (i.e. cognitive-based) altruism, each contributing to holistic benevolence, 10) matching of externally expressed backings with internal intents, thus imbuing ‘true’ altruism, 11) desires for partners to recognise their earnest concerns – mostly as a means of showing their reliable presences, 12) simultaneous valuations of altruism as a beloved-centric and relationship-defining quality, 13) active, instead of restrained, nurturing, 14) empathies, shaped by their efforts to see things from partners’ standpoints, and 15) assessments of altruism as value-in-itself and value-added. As I have shown, each of these experiential themes indivisibly emerges from individualised, image schematic, and cultural processes of meaning-making.

Thus far I have explored interviewees’ common experiences of self-growth, friendship, attraction, and altruism within their intimate relations. In the next chapter, I move on to discuss ‘reciprocity’ – a fifth super-ordinate theme that, in my opinion, is especially pertinent to their optimal conditions of ‘being in love’.
11. Reciprocity

“Is it possible for a person to love without wanting love back? Is anything so pure? Or is love, by its nature, a reciprocity, like oceans and clouds, an evaporating of seawater and a replenishing of rain?”

(Lightman 2003, p. 192)

The four shared qualities I have discussed thus far are each crucial to interviewees’ intimate relations. However, I contend it is ‘reciprocity’ that binds all these ingredients together to form their most ‘ideal’ states of ‘being in love’. Dan’s remarks introduce this super-ordinate theme:

Honestly, I think, yeah – to me, we just work best … [because] I think we’re just fair, just [with] how we treat each other … We’ve a lot of mutual respect … End of the day, I think – to me, that’s how … we’ve stayed in love … even with the ups and downs. (Dan)

Fiona, Ben, and Rachel express parallel thoughts:

Like, we’re mutual, ya know? … He shows me affection … [and] I show him affection … I reckon, like – he’s legit there for me … when it matters … [and] I’ve here for him … I reckon our dynamic’s … like, we’re pretty much like that, mostly. (Fiona)

Things ain’t lopsided, mate – ain’t one-way … We’re knowin’ to give-and-take, ‘tween us two … I ain’t takin’ her for granted … She’s hardly disrespectin’ me … We’re givin’ both ends, mate. (Ben)

Um, I was sick as a dog last week … [and] he surprised me … [by] really driving out of his way to … get me my favourite soup … He’s still really sweet, after so long … I, uh – I’d say, I really do try … [to] do the same for him, as much as I can … especially in crisis mode … I sort out his papers … [and] file his documents for him … He’s always a mess! … I really feel, uh – I feel the small stuff … we do for one another … It’s nothing but – uh, I feel it does matter? (Rachel)

In simplest terms, then, I interpret reciprocity for interviewees mainly involves their impressions of partners’ ‘giving back’ what is actively ‘given to’ them.\textsuperscript{179} Let us explore some of the major experiential themes thriving this broad definition.

\textsuperscript{179} Certain broad contradictions seem to exist between reciprocity and other super-ordinate themes. For instance, interviewees on one hand describe their \textit{selfless} desires for beloveds’ betterments (i.e. altruism). Yet, they also appear \textit{self-concerned} with wanting partners to return an approximately similar measure of thematic expressions (i.e. reciprocity, as will be covered). However, like other similar instances throughout this thesis, I wish to clarify that such imagination-based experiences are not necessarily perceived by interviewees within the exact same moment, nor do they abide to strict either / or reasoning. Thus, it is entirely possible for them to, say, feel prevalently altruistic towards
11.1. Experiential Themes of Reciprocity

As established above, reciprocity centers on interviewees’ perceptions of mutual exchanges between partners and themselves. These exchanges have varying facets. In rare cases, they may be focused on the literal trading of physical goods (i.e. gift-giving reciprocity). For instance, Fiona – who adheres to Valentine’s Day traditions – talks about swapping annual presents with Jack as a “super cheesy but kinda fun … token of our love”. Other interviewees show similar reciprocal habits, albeit to differing extents:

Jane actually shocked me! … *She got me this drone* … I’ve been ogling [at] online for ages … It’s a Mavic Pro! … I’m honestly thinking – *I’m getting her something good in return for her birthday* … Just been looking at this OmniBlend blender … I think, it’s a bit pricey … [but] honestly – she’s been eyeing it for weeks … Na, she didn’t ask me for it (laughs) … I just want to *surprise her in return* … She’ll go nuts for it! (Dan)

You probably ain’t tellin’, seein’ us … [but] Christmas’s our favorite time … We’re always *givin’ and exchangin’* … small presents, Christmas eve … Ain’t nothin’ big – small trinkets and shit … [but] we’re doin’ … our tradition for years now. (Ben)

Uh, I’d say, we really usually have a nice dinner somewhere, usually Italian … [and] *exchange anniversary gifts* … He usually buys me, um – I guess, something art-related? Usually along those lines … I try to switch my gift around … [so] he can never guess. (Rachel) [emphasis on gift-giving reciprocity]

However, interviewees make it clear that such gift exchanges are, on their own, a marginal facet of reciprocity vis-à-vis ‘being in love’ (i.e. physical presents alone do not define their relationships). Instead, a far more pivotal dimension of this shared quality lies with the trading of deeds / gestures that, to them, are felt to represent multifarious aspects of other super-ordinate themes (i.e. thematic reciprocity).180 In other words, the most defining kind of mutual exchange with beloveds is based on two-way conveyances of different degrees of self-growth, friendship,
attraction, and altruism. This style of reciprocity is an essential part of affirming their loving attitudes, nourishing their feelings of partners’ co-invested appraisals. For instance, Rachel talks about her “mutual emotional connection” with Steve – a reciprocal attraction that helps her know “he still loves me … [as] much as I love him”:

Um – I’d say, I really feel … we still have a really … strong emotional bond … I’m still drawn to him … same as I was, back then … I know he feels the same … [because] he shows me, almost every day … Uh, definitely, it’s a nice feeling, it’s very comforting for me … knowing he’s still attracted … as much as I am … I know it’s not an easy thing to, uh – I guess, maybe for some people, it’s hard to keep such feelings up? Maybe it’s too much effort … [But] I really feel – I mean, we’re both very mutual … [in] expressing ourselves, to one another … That really helps our relationship. (Rachel) [emphasis on thematic reciprocal attraction (i.e. emotional)]

Other interviewees also describe their assorted thematic reciprocities amidst ‘being in love’:

Last week she called up … all my friends for me … [to] organise this get-together I’ve been meaning to have … I felt bad … [because] I was too busy … [to] do it on my own … [so] she just upped and helped me, just cause she wanted to … Honestly, I think, yeah – I’m just blessed … [by] how far she goes for me … I think, yeah – there’s so much I love about her … As her partner – I just – I put in my best … [to] just do the same for her in return … as best as I can. (Dan) [emphasis on thematic reciprocal altruism]

I reckon Jack’s legit inspired me – like, I’m way, way more passionate now and stuff … He’s a big influence … I reckon, like – I also taught him to be … more, like, outgoing and friendly … and approachable and all that, ya know? … I love him and how, like – we both bring out … our A-game for each other and stuff. (Fiona) [emphasis on thematic reciprocal self-growth]

Mate, I ain’t ever wantin’ to feel … [it’s] only me wantin’ sex … Ain’t wantin’ to be beggin’ like some fool – [like] my mate Lester – he’s always beggin’ for affection from his girl … Lucky Sarah ain’t like that … She’s showin’ … she’s wantin’ it as much as me, know what I mean? … We both got … proper urges, two of us … Ain’t only ‘bout the sex … It’s [also] keepin’ our love active. mate. (Ben) [emphasis on thematic reciprocal attraction (i.e. physical)]

In most cases, reciprocity is not limited to exchanges of the same type of thematic deed / gesture. For instance, interviewees often indicate how given aspects of friendship (e.g. finding similarities, etc.) invite for friendly responses. However, reactions of self-growth, attraction, and altruism may

---

181 Thus, thematic reciprocity may include interviewees’ diverse references to general exchanges of super-ordinate themes (e.g. friendship, altruism, etc.) and / or their more nuanced facets (e.g. interpersonal chemistry, empathy, etc.).
182 This two-way process often entails a distinct to / from perspective wherein interviewees are inclined to focus on both themselves and their imaginings of partners’ expressive intents / reactions. For instance, they often speak of their altruistic gestures to partners as they envision beloveds’ self-growths derived from such given supports (i.e. also applies to role reversals of giving / receiving). To this degree, reciprocity transforms interviewees’ loving feelings from being merely about their own experiences into their concurrent grasps of partners as equally important creators / experiencers of the phenomenon. This symbiotic condition is in itself a formative aspect of their optimal loving states.
also be seen as equally reciprocal returns (depending on the situational context). In such respects, I posit interviewees exercise a good degree of evaluative flexibility, wherein exchanged expressions of various super-ordinate themes (and their nuances) are treated as roughly interchangeable ‘qualitative currencies’. Fiona and Rachel allude to this observation:

Went with Jack to Belgrave, few days ago … He was shooting urban shots and stuff for his Tuesday vid … I reckon, like – I was super busy … with my own stuff … [but] I reckon, ya know – I’ll help him out … I didn’t mind, not at all … I mean, like – ya know, he always spares his time … [to] motivate me and inspire me … [and] give me pep talks and stuff … [so] it’s no biggie for me … I legit enjoy … going the extra mile, only for him. (Fiona) [emphasis on evaluative flexibility in reciprocal altruism (i.e. physical / emotional support of personal betterment) and self-growth (i.e. virtuous enhancement)]

Um, Steve’s not – I’d say, well – he’s most definitely not a natural art buff. (laughs) … [But] he really tries … As in, he tries to learn … who my favourite artists are … [and] tries to be interested … in the same things as me … Um – well, I guess – I try to return the favour … [but] really, I get really lost … [with] the technical jargon he likes … Well, I guess, um – I make up for it, in some sense? … I’m really – I’m cautious … [but] I still encourage him with his [Forex] trading … I really want him … [to] live his dream … [of] going full-time. (Rachel) [emphasis on evaluative flexibility in reciprocal friendship (i.e. commonality) and altruism (i.e. emotional support of personal betterment)]

What counts as a reciprocal deed / gesture seems to be discerned via two main evaluative routes. First, interviewees tend to regard words (either spoken or written) as a valid form of mutual thematic communication. For instance, Fiona often verbally praises Jack for “how good he looks” whilst also sometimes desiring for him to “call me beautiful” (i.e. spoken reciprocal attraction (physical)). Meanwhile, Dan and Jane both occasionally stick motivational ‘post-it’ notes to “remind each other … [to] keep hustling … [and] not procrastinate” (i.e. written reciprocal self-growth / altruism). Ben and Rachel also place value in words:

I ain’t shy tellin’ her … she’s the one motivatin’ me … to work harder … I’m a fuckin’ bludger [i.e. slang for ‘extremely lazy person’] … [but] I’m wantin’ to … work hard to provide now, mate … She’s sayin’ to me, tellin’ me … [how] seein’ me’s makin’ her … want to work hard, too. (Ben) [emphasis on spoken reciprocal self-growth (i.e. virtuous enhancement)]

We really text a lot … [especially] when he’s overseas … Um, I guess – well, I’d say, we’re quite mushy? (laughs) … It’s not everyone’s cup of tea … We usually text to … say we miss one another … [or] we’re both thinking of each other. (Rachel) [emphasis on written reciprocal attraction (i.e. emotional existential-spatial nearness)]

Of course, there are some instances where interviewees prefer a give-and-take of similar super-ordinate expressions – for instance, amidst physical attraction (e.g. Ben’s desires for Jane to also “be showin’ she’s keen”). However, for most reciprocal occasions, interviewees appear to practice a salient amount of evaluative flexibility. Reciprocal exchanges of self-growth / altruism are often (but not always) perceptually interlaced – mostly owed to closely related thematic meanings. For instance, from interviewees’ perspectives, many of their expressed altruisms aid with beloveds’ self-growths, with partners’ returned benevolences felt to inspire their own virtuous enhancements.
A second evaluative route is predicated on exchanged actions. This entails interviewees’ senses of both persons physically carrying out activities that, to them, indicate the qualities that define ‘being in love’. Steve, for example, invests effort to attend most of Rachel’s art exhibitions, just as much as she takes the time to “sort through … [his] overflowing emails” (i.e. actioned reciprocal altruism). Other interviewees give a similar credence to this evaluative mode:

Honestly, we’re just quite busy – busy people … [but] I think, yeah – two, three days a week – we just at least … both put aside time … [to] sit down together … [for] lunch – mostly dinner … usually, I think – at least, an hour, maybe two … No distractions, no phones, or anything … Just ‘us’ time … No one else. (Dan) [emphasis on actioned reciprocal friendship (i.e. inclusive ‘we-union’)]

He’s pretty rowdy … [when] he’s drunk … [but] I reckon, like – ‘I’m there to calm him down and stuff … [and] nag at him … [to] stay in his limit … I reckon, he tells me he’s better at controlling himself now … cause of me – like, cause I’m there …. I legit ramble when I talk – can you tell? (laughs) … [When] Jack’s around – what he does – like, he’ll put his hand … on my shoulder, quietly … [when] we’re with friends or something … [and] I know he’s trying to tell me, “Shush!” … I reckon I’m much better … [all] staying on point now, thanks to him. (Fiona) [emphasis on actioned reciprocal altruism (i.e. physical / emotional support of personal betterment) / self-growth (i.e. virtuous enhancement)]

We’re takin’ effort … goin’ out, doin’ things we’re both lovin’, together … We ain’t doin’ that so much before – now we’re both tryin’ … Other day we went hikin’ for hours, down at Two Bays … Hot as fuck, sweatin’ like dogs … [but] the place’s fuckin’ beautiful, mate! (Ben) [emphasis on actioned reciprocal friendship (i.e. commonality)]

On an obvious level, reciprocal words and actions are predominantly entwined with each other. For instance, Dan’s aforementioned ‘us’ time with Jane equally relies on both verbal and physical exchanges (i.e. mutual conversations / shared efforts to have lunch or dinner). However, this distinction remains crucial in cases where interviewees imply thematically expressive actions to be ultimately a bigger factor in determining ‘true’ – that is, mutually self-authentic – reciprocity. Put simply, amidst some contexts, ‘actions speak louder than words’ insofar as showing reciprocity is more important than simply saying it (e.g. ‘doing’ friendship together is

185 These indicators vary amongst interviewees, based on their unique self-experiences and interactions with respective beloveds. Ben, for example, sees Sarah’s mutual “likin’ [of] rough foreplay” as part of actioned reciprocal attraction (i.e. physical). However, other interviewees do not openly include such thematic valuations. Similar biographical divergences apply to spoken / written words.

186 However, in some instances, actions alone may be felt to so powerfully signify various super-ordinate themes that accompanying words are not fully needed. For instance, Dan claims that, sometimes, having “true intimacy” with Jane does not necessarily involve actual speaking. Instead, touch is all that is needed to mutually express being “lost in each other” (i.e. actioned reciprocal attraction (physical / emotional)).

187 Here, self-authenticity centers on interviewees desires for both persons’ outward thematic expressions to match their respective inner intents (e.g. actioning out sincere wants for mutual friendship, etc.).
better than just claiming to be friends, etc. – even as both communicative aspects are valued). Dan and Ben’s remarks exemplify this observation:

I think, honestly – I just promise her … I’ll do something for her… [and] I actually – I just try to keep my word … [even] sometimes it’s time-consuming … [or] I need to go someplace … She does the same for me … [even] for just some small thing … I think, yeah, in general, I think, the two of us – we live up to our word … I think that’s important … [to] proving you’re really committed … [and] not just making empty promises … [or] taking the easy road. (Dan)

She’s proper good … [at] showin’ she’s really hearin’ me out … ain’t only humourin’ me and shit … She ain’t all shifty, lookin’ ’round the place … I’m also showin’ effort … lettin’ her know I’m really hearin’ her … We’re both makin’ real effort findin’ common ground. (Ben) [emphasis on ‘true’ actioned reciprocity]

Self-initiative is also integral to interviewees’ senses of ‘true’ reciprocity. Specifically, they state that mutual exchanges should feel voluntary to both partners and themselves\(^{188}\), actively conveyed ‘really’ for their own sake – not out of pressured obligations or relational expectations to do so.\(^{189}\)

For example, Rachel appreciates Steve for “feel[ing] he wants to … [be] more involved in my art projects … [because] he feels I support heaps of his stuff” (i.e. self-initiated reciprocal altruism). To her, this is a ‘true’ reciprocal act that comes “straight from the heart” (Rachel). Dan, Fiona, and Ben hold comparable views:

I think, honestly – she never holds back … That’s just the way she is … I just like how she chooses to be honest to me … I think, yeah – I naturally want to be honest with her, too … I don’t think, no – it’s not hard for me. (Dan) [emphasis on self-initiated reciprocal friendship (i.e. self-authenticity)]

I reckon, like, I’m usually … the first person he thinks of … [and] calls up … [when] he’s got good news and stuff to share … He kinda, like – he gets super excited, like a child (laughs) … I reckon, like – I kinda do the same thing … okay, maybe a bit different … He’s always the first person … I kinda want to turn to – first person I think of … for advice and stuff, ya know? (Fiona) [emphasis on self-initiated reciprocal attraction (i.e. emotional existential-spatial nearness)]

I’m always willin’ to see the best in her, mate … I’m bein’ frank – sometimes she’s drivin’ me up the fuckin’ wall … [but that] ain’t stoppin’ me from seein’ good in her … You know me,

---

\(^{188}\) As per usual, interviewees’ gauges of beloveds’ intents are invariably limited to ‘best guesses’ that occur within their own self-experiences.

\(^{189}\) By contrast, thematic expressions that seem to emerge out of coercion or hesitancy are, in most cases, taken to be less reflective of ‘real’ reciprocity. For example, Ben imagines “gettin’ fuckin’ upset” if Sarah ever resorts to “fakin’ bein’ keen” in returning his physical intimacy (i.e. a lack of ‘true’ voluntary reciprocity). However, to be clear, there are also many other occasions where refrained deeds / gestures may be less detrimental. For instance, Fiona recalls trying to convince Jack to “appear on one of my makeup videos … [because] I once cameoed in his”. In the end, he was unwilling to do so. Regardless, Fiona still believes in Jack’s ‘truly’ reciprocal nature since, overall, “we usually say ‘yes’ … to each other anyway”. In this regard, I interpret interviewees’ readings of self-initiative (both for partners and themselves) are seldom based on singular contexts, but rather, are discerned across multiple expressive situations (i.e. via ‘temporal traversals’ – to be discussed).
mate – I ain’t classy – I’m rough ‘round the edges … Lucky I got Sarah … willin’ to see past my shit … seein’ me as a good bloke … [and] believin’ I’m improv’in’.

(Ben) [emphasis on self-initiated reciprocal self-growth (i.e. idealisations of each other)]

As readers may have already gleamed, interviewees’ reciprocities are driven by their wants for relational ‘fairness’.[190] Here, I use the term[191] to imply their ongoing aspirations to maintain qualitatively balanced relationships with beloveds – mostly based on their assessments of self-initiated, two-way thematic expressions.[192] However, the key point I want to make is that, for interviewees, this figurative equality seems less to do with ‘how many’ situational times self-growth, friendship, etc. are mutually conveyed. Instead, their main emphasis is ‘how much’ (i.e. the interpreted extent in which) these exchanged deeds / gestures are felt to represent various superordinate themes.[193] For example, Fiona suggests Jack’s sporadic yet genuine reminders for her to “take care of my health … [and] not overwork too much” shows his high degree of reciprocal altruism (i.e. based on ‘how much’ and not ‘how many’ times he expresses this). This in turn leads her to sense a good amount of thematic fairness in their partnership. Rachel’s description further illustrates this shared quality:

Um, no – I’d say, we seldom, uh – we really try not to … step on each other’s work space too much … I feel, me and him – we’re very careful not to be a busybody … [But] I feel, uh – if it’s me, or him – when we do say something – I feel it’s really … [because] we really want to help one another improve … how we’re doing something … I really feel, um – I’d say, we strike a good balance … as in – we’re very even … in how we … try to motivate … [and] encourage one another. (Rachel) [emphasis on fair reciprocal self-growth / altruism, based on ‘how much’ and not ‘how many’ thematic expressions are given]

Interviewees’ aims for fairness are underscored by two seemingly counterintuitive – but ultimately conflated – features. On one hand, they generally avoid strict quid pro quo exchanges with partners, favouring instead more lenient, less calculative bilateral relations. These abstinences from rigid ‘score-keeping’ (e.g. holding precise tabs of given / received expressions)[194] feed into

---

190 Interviewees often speak directly of ‘fairness’ (e.g. Fiona aims for her relationship to “feel fair and stuff”) – but also use close semantic associations (e.g. Rachel describes her “really even” dynamics with Steve, etc.).

191 Fairness is by itself a highly polysemous and complex experience. Readers may wish to refer to McParland et al. (2011), Spiegelberg (1986), and Stith (1982) for differing phenomenological treatises.

192 Of course, what is discerned as fair varies greatly amongst interviewees, due to diverse personal preferences / experiential priorities. For instance, Dan tends to express his wishes for balanced friendship, whilst Rachel usually homes in on equal emotional attraction. Regardless, all interviewees, at some point or another, describe the importance of fair exchanges in every super-ordinate theme, united by the proceeding common feature.

193 For each interviewee, ‘how much’ an expression captures a super-ordinate theme seems to depend on his / her individualised perceptions of accumulated qualities discussed throughout this chapter (i.e. self-initiated exchanges, actions over words, etc.).

194 This form of score-keeping might include, for example, expecting a deed in return for each given gesture, requiring every super-ordinate expression to be reciprocated in similar ways, etc.
their beliefs that obsessing too much with exact balances may potentially stymie self-initiative (as discussed). Such erosions would come from pressures to uphold a petty and overbearing sense of equality. By contrast, exercising a more relaxed approach to reciprocity means any derived sense of fairness is more likely to be organically formed via sincere investments in each other, free from ‘owed’ mutuality.

Ain’t keepin’ score … who’s initiatin’ who, mate … That’s anal as fuck! … [If] she’s wantin’ to, she’s wantin’ to … I ain’t wantin’ her feelin’ pressured … [into] bein’ intimate … [just] cause I’m her boyfriend … I ain’t wantin’ her thinkin’, oh, she’s only appeasin’ me … We’re intimate … [cause] we’re naturally … wantin’ the same, mate … Ain’t cause we’re owin’ each other. (Ben) [emphasis on restraints from quid pro quo exchanges / absconding from feelings of obligation / nurturing organic fairness]

I honestly think, yeah – we just actively take the initiative … [to] do things – go on dates – do stuff together … I don’t think, nah – we definitely – we don’t fuss over … who takes more initiative … I don’t worry about that … I think we’re mutual as we are … We always – we just go with the flow. (Dan) [emphasis on voluntary fairness / avoidance of score-keeping]

On the other hand, despite this leniency, interviewees still pursue at least a decent amount of fairness in their relationships. As such, they show lingering signs of tentatively gauging the overall reciprocal balance of their thematic exchanges. This seems to be partly due to fears of “things goin’ too one-sided” (Ben) that, in effect, works against how “equal partners ought to be” (Dan).

I reckon, like – I won’t want to be … trying to have a serious D&M [i.e. deep-and-meaningful conversation] with him … [and] he’s, like – not even bothered to listen … It wouldn’t be fair, ya know? … Especially since I’m always paying attention to him … [Thankfully] he’s not so self-centered, though – thank God … I, like – I reckon we’re fair at listening for now … [but if] he stops being fair and stuff … I reckon, like – [if] it’s once a while – fine … [but] if he’s, like – if he’s ignoring me all the time … I’ll be legit peeved. (Fiona)

I’m really happy … [to] help Steve … organise his crazy schedule … I’d say, uh – well, I feel it’s very nice … he returns the favour to me, too … I mean, um – I really don’t ask for him to … [but] he does it anyway … [which] is really nice … Uh, yeah – I’d say, um – I’ll probably feel weirded out … [if] say, um – I help him ten times … [and] he refuses to help me, even once? … I’d feel, uh – well, I’m really very flexible … [but] I’d definitely feel, uh – he’s being really unfair, yeah. (Rachel) [emphasis on tentatively fair reciprocity]

Consolidating the above points, interviewees’ reciprocities are thus characterised by their concurrent wishes to avoid unfairness (i.e. imbalanced, non-mutual, etc.) and excessive fairness (i.e. too calculative, obligatory, etc.). This ‘middling’ condition, so to speak, is best summed up by Dan:

195 In some ways, this condition echoes Ben-Zeév & Goussinsky’s distinctions between “superficial and profound reciprocity” (2008, p. 222). Superficial reciprocity “involves mechanical calculations about what I give and what I get
I mean, there’s always expectations in every relationship … We’re no exception … I think, yeah – as her partner, I just want to give as much of myself as possible … At the same time, honestly – end of the day, there needs to be a fair balance … I don’t think anyone wants to feel shortchanged … [with] trying their best … and not having … any love or attention in return … Who wants that? Nobody wants that … I know, for me, I think – I’m just not a guy who’s too fussed about … who’s more involved … [or] who’s the most committed or whatever … It’s just a childish mindset … [But] at the same time, yeah – I’ll be honest – I don’t want to feel – no one wants to feel … they’re the ones doing everything … [or] the only one putting in initiative … End of the day, I think every good relationship … just naturally comes from both sides … and just feels balanced, to both parties … I think, yeah – that’s just how relationships ought to be. (Dan) [emphasis on striking a middling condition between unfairness and excessive fairness]

Interviewees’ experiences of reciprocity unfold over a reasonable stretch of time – not immediately. That is to say, they often seem to assess the occurrence of ‘true’ mutuality, middling fairness, etc. in temporally traversing ways, discerned across multiple – rather than one-off interactions with partners (with a good degree of evaluative flexibility, as previously mentioned). For instance, Rachel recalls her initiative in helping “Steve get pass some emotional issues” during the early days of their relationship. In turn, she feels her past altruistic deeds have partly inspired her partner to “most times … show heaps of concern … anytime I’m really stressed … with anything” (Rachel). In other words, her overall reading of his returned benevolence is not limited to a single instance / context, but rather, imaginatively extends across the duration of their relationship (i.e. temporal traversal). Other interviewees mirror this broad style of assessment:

Years back, mate – I’m in the fuckin’ dumps … Broke, drunk, proper fuckin’ bum … [but] I’m wantin’ … [to be] a better man now … I’m tryin’ for her … I’m tryin’ for a long time … Sarah’s slowly seein’ … I’m makin’ myself better … She’s knowin’ … I’m givin’ it my all, improvin’ for

out of the relationship” (Ben-Zeév & Goussinsky 2008, p. 222) – in essence, the quid pro quo / score-keeping exchanges I described. By contrast, profound reciprocity occurs when “each person seeks the happiness and well-being of the other, without focusing unduly on superficial calculations” (Ben-Zeév & Goussinsky 2008, p. 222). This form of altruistic exchange is especially pertinent to “genuine romantic love” (Ben-Zeév & Goussinsky 2008, p. 222). However, the authors also suggest that, at the same time, “it [is] difficult if only one partner gave the other presents, remembered anniversaries, offered cups of tea – while the other offered none of these symbolic acts of giving” (Ben-Zeév & Goussinsky, p. 222). Thus, amidst intimate partnerships, “it is not the mechanical giving [per se] that matters as much as the symbolic … acts that indicate the other’s significance” (Ben-Zeév & Goussinsky, p. 222). Applied to our current context, then, I interpret interviewees’ straddling goals to avoid unfairness / excessive fairness are, in some sense, partly derivative of their co-running hopes for mechanical reciprocity (i.e. ensuring a tentatively equal amount of symbolic exchange, as a mutual sign of recognition) and profound reciprocity (i.e. leniency due to sincere aims to not make beloveds feel pressured / obligated).

As said at the start of Part B, what constitutes as ‘reasonable’ varies amongst interviewees. Here, the point is that each person susses out the epistemic presence (or absence) of reciprocity based on his / her personal time-frame references (e.g. how long ago / far ahead he / she recalls or anticipates instances of mutuality).

This discernment applies to interviewees’ dual reflections on partners’ and their own efforts at reciprocity.

There are of course possible exceptions to this rule. For instance, Fiona imagines herself as “immediately break[ing] up with Jack” if he is ever unfaithful – since this single instance would be an absolute and sudden breach of fairness to her.

As explained before, this duration includes interviewees’ past recollections, present situational reflections, and future-oriented imaginings, each cyclically informative of their general impressions of beloveds’ reciprocities.
her ... [and] givin’ back to her ... I’m also seein’ ... she’s makin’ big steps ... gettin’ her shit together – no more drugs and shit ... I’m seein’ she’s makin’ effort, bit by bit, same like me ... We’re both makin’ effort ... [to] get our shit together ... Ain’t happenin’ overnight ... [but] I’m takin’ it, mate. (Ben) [emphasis on temporally traversing assessments of reciprocal self-growth / altruism]

Like, we haven’t been too intimate and stuff lately ... We’re legit super busy, ya know? ... He’s travelling a lot lately and stuff ... [and] I reckon, like – I’m always running here and there for some shoot ... I don’t mind – there’s no rush [to be intimate] – like, not right now anyway ... I reckon – I know for sure we’re still ... both [physically] into each other ... We actually got a holiday coming up ... I reckon we’ll get it on then. (laughs) (Fiona) [emphasis on temporally traversing assessments of reciprocal attraction (i.e. physical)]

I have thus far explored reciprocity with regards to interviewees’ expressive exchanges of other shared qualities of ‘being in love’ (i.e. two-way tradings of self-growth, friendship, attraction, and altruism). However, at this juncture, it is worth mentioning that the very idea of mutuality\(^{200}\) is in itself valued by them as a formative aspect of their loving relations. To this degree, interviewees’ bilateral acts of giving / receiving are at once appreciated as defining facets of diverse thematic experiences and a unique style of relationality valued for its own principled strengths. Fiona and Ben’s responses showcase the latter:

Our dynamic’s, like – we’re mutual and stuff ... I like that, ya know? ... Obviously, like – I’m not gonna act like some silly princess ... I don’t demand attention ... [but] I expect ... us to stay mutual ... I reckon I want to ... feel he loves me ... as much as I love him. (Fiona)

Ain’t fair ... [if] she’s givin’ her all ... [and] I ain’t givin’ shit, mate ... I ain’t wantin’ us windin’ up ... [like] most folks I’m knowin’ ... Love ain’t ‘bout bein’ selfish – it ain’t one-sided ... Love’s ‘bout givin’ and recevin’ ... Ain’t seein’ it any other ways, mate. (Ben) [emphasis on reciprocity as a super-ordinate theme by its own right]

Many esoteric discussions on reciprocity tend to conceptually include the exchange of negative deeds – tantamount to acrimonious ‘eye for an eye’ relations (e.g. Bereby-Meyer & Fiks 2013; Caliendo, Fossen & Kritikos 2012; Chen, YR, Chen, XP & Portnoy 2009). However, amidst their everyday partnerships, interviewees make it clear that engaging in such harmful tit-for-tat activities (e.g. seeking revenge, abusive insults, etc.) would severely undermine “the whole point of ... saying you love someone and stuff” (Fiona). To this extent, reciprocal experiences with beloveds are, in their opinion, as much to do with trying to avoid mutual inflictions of hurt\(^{201}\) as they are about nourishing positive two-way expressions.

\(^{200}\) This includes their varying allusions to fairness, equality, balance, etc.

\(^{201}\) Of course, arguments with partners are bound to occasionally happen, causing a fair – albeit temporary – amount of negative reciprocity. However, these hurtful moments are largely seen by interviewees as counterintuitive to the kind of beneficial exchanges needed to foster their ‘ideal’ moments of ‘being in love’.

143
Honestly, we argue sometimes … but] end of the day, yeah – she and I, we just … don’t get into the whole vicious cycle … We don’t like trading jabs … I don’t think that’s healthy … At the most, I think – yeah, usually I’ll take a time-out … or] she’ll just leave the room for a while … to just calm down … There’s no sense to make both of us angrier … [by] saying things we’ll regret later. (Dan)

Um, I hate feeling – as in, I really don’t like passive aggressiveness? … I tend to, uh – I try to avoid it … [and] be more constructive … Steve’s the same too … I really feel it’s really pointless … sending bad vibes to one another … We don’t solve anything … I don’t feel any better …

neither does he. (Rachel) [emphasis on avoiding negative reciprocity]

Reciprocity often begets gratitude. 202 Here, I am specifically referring to interviewees’ feelings of being privileged recipients of their idealised beloveds’ various thematic expressions. This engendered thankfulness does not imply unbridled deference or servitude. Rather, it entails their humble cherishments at being ‘chosen’ beneficiaries of such exalted experiences 204 – which they, too, are equally giving to their ‘chosen’ partners.

Mate, I’m always sayin’ – I’m a lucky bloke … [that] Sarah’s botherin’ to see good in me … I’m a proper ass … [but] she’s findin’ it … in her heart … [to be] kind to me, carin’ for me … I’m grateful, mate … I ain’t askin’ for more … I’m also givin’ her my all – ain’t holdin’ back. (Ben)

Like, I reckon – I’m thankful he’s open … [to] share his life with me … There’s other guys – they’re into me … [but] I reckon, like – I’m legit only interested in him … I’m thankful … we have each other … [to] share ourselves with … He’s not always easy – once a while, he’s a pain in the ass, ya know? … [But] I’m legit happy I’m with him. (Fiona) [emphasis on gratitude amidst reciprocity]

Like previous chapters, I now switch my focus to exploring a few image schemas that both imbue and constrain interviewees’ meaningful grasps of reciprocity.

11.2. Image Schemas of Reciprocity

As first explored in Chapter 8, BALANCE is a recurring pattern that initially “emerge[s] through our acts of balancing and through our experience of systematic processes and states within our bodies” (Johnson 1987, p. 75). This image schema also informs the “closely related experience of bodily

---

202 Like fairness, gratitude is worthy of its own phenomenological analysis. Readers may refer to Elfers & Hlava (2013, 2016) for an extensive look at this distinct style of experience.

203 As discussed in Chapter 7, interviewees are inclined to elevate partners’ discerned virtues more so than most other persons. This idealisation is especially pertinent to gratitude, in that they see increased value in receiving thematic expressions from such exceptional persons.

204 This relates to interviewees’ broader appraisals of the perceived inherent values of self-growth, friendship, attraction, altruism, and reciprocity in itself.
equilibrium, or loss of equilibrium” (Johnson 1987, p. 75). To this degree, I propose interviewees’ subliminal extensions of these embodied logics are in fact central to how they conceive reciprocity. Specifically, readers can easily observe how their metaphorical references to fair / equal (i.e. BALANCED) thematic exchanges with mutually (i.e. EQUALLY) expressive partners would be quite incomprehensible without the underlying support of such body-based structures.205

Yeah, I mean – I think it’s just important … we just have … balanced expectations … [of what] we want from each other. (Dan)

I reckon, like – we’re almost equal … like, [in] how we relate and stuff. (Fiona)

As I’m sayin’, mate – we ain’t one-sided … We’re fair. (Ben)

Um, I feel, most of the time – we’re very even between us … very mutual, mostly. (Rachel) [emphasis on BALANCE / EQUILIBRIUM-reliant reasonings]

ENABLEMENT – which, again, arises from our corporeally-grounded “sense of power (or lack of power) to perform some action” (Johnson 1987, p. 47) – gives coherent form to “the first-person ‘power’ perspective” (Gärdenfors 2007, p. 189). This perspective in turn nurtures more complex reflections on carrying out voluntary – rather than COMPULSIVE – decisions. In light of this, I propose interviewees’ latent learnings of this schematic pattern are crucial to colouring their elaborate notions of self-initiated – that is, freely ENABLED – reciprocity.

We choose to make time for the other … no matter how busy … It’s just something we set our minds to. (Dan)

Like, I reckon we both decided … [to] try to, like – to encourage each other more, ya know? (Fiona)

She ain’t forcin’ me, mate … I’m wantin’ to work harder – for us … She’s wantin’ to … pick up her own slack, too. (Ben)

Steve never forces me … [to] help him … I do it on my own accord. (Rachel) [emphasis on ENABLEMENT-dependent meanings]

Evaluative flexibility also relies on embodied reasoning. In particular, CONTAINER frames interviewees’ abilities to experientially categorise (i.e. CATEGORIES ARE CONTAINERS) exchanged deeds / gestures according to their mental definitions of various super-ordinate themes and their

---

205 Interviewees’ BALANCED-inspired elaborations seem to overlay with A PERSON IS A CONTAINER / CONSCIOUSNESS IS A PATH, inspiring their imaginings of two persons’ directing their ‘boundaried’ attentions to each other in EQUALLY expressive ways.
entailments. At the same time, their treatments of each expression being *valuationally similar* to others implicitly abide to patterns of MATCHING. Once more, whilst appearing abstract, these imaginative processes are ultimately only possible due to the schematic gestalts that capacitate them.

Um, I’d say – I’m really very good … [at] reading his voice? … I can tell when he’s really concerned … [and] trying to respond to … [what] I’m feeling, what I’m saying … I think, uh – most times, he’s very good at reading me … He really knows when I’m really … trying to be on the same page as him. (Rachel) [emphasis on CATEGORIES ARE CONTAINERS (i.e. cognitively classifying experiences according to types of thematic expression)]

I think, yeah – I mean, whether she’s being honest … [or] I’m cheering her up … I think, end of the day, it’s all the same … We’re just investing ourselves … [in] reciprocating. (Dan) [emphasis on MATCHING-inspired notions]

Interviewees’ dislikes of *quid pro quo* tradings are also meaningfully indebted to BALANCE which, in this case, structures their fears of excessive equality (i.e. EQUILIBRIUM). In addition, BLOCKAGE – that emerges when “we … encounter obstacles that block or resist our force” (Johnson 1987, p. 45) – fosters their senses of such stringent relations being inhibitive to (i.e. BLOCKING) self-initiative. Meanwhile, interviewees’ concerns over unfair exchanges are derivative of IMBALANCE, spurring their apprehendings of inequality, one-sidedness, and other attritions of EQUILIBRIUM.

I know some people – they’re too even-steven – too petty with their partners … They’re just so hung up on trivial stuff, just expecting everything down the middle … I think, yeah – I don’t want to be that guy … I think, honestly, it’ll just stop either of us … [from] wanting to give anything. (Dan) [emphasis on BALANCE / EQUILIBRIUM / BLOCKAGE patterns]

Mate, if she’s wantin’ to be [sexually] exclusive, and I ain’t – ain’t no way I’m fair to her, know what I mean? … We ain’t bein’ equal like that. (Ben) [emphasis on IMBALANCE / lack of EQUILIBRIUM imaginings]

BALANCE is further activated amidst interviewees’ temporally traversing assessments. Here, imaginative overlays with PART-WHOLE are also in effect, facilitating them in seeing each thematic deed / gesture as one of many expressions (i.e. PARTS) contributing to their overall (i.e. WHOLE) perceptions of reciprocity (i.e. BALANCE / EQUILIBRIUM).

I reckon, like – he has moments, here and there – once in a while … [when] he opens up and all that … [and] other times I do, too … Like, all in all, I reckon we’re pretty mutual, letting down our walls and stuff. (Fiona) [emphasis on PART-WHOLE / BALANCE elaborations]

COUNTERFORCE – which “focuses on the head-on meetings of forces” (Johnson 1987, p. 46) – appears to subtend interviewees’ opinions that negative reciprocity opposes (i.e. COUNTERFORCES) their efforts to cultivate loving relations.
I really feel, uh – well, I’d say, getting angry … [and] trying to hurt one another … really works against … any love we have … It’s very counterproductive … I, uh – I really feel – we definitely … try not to fall into negative feelings. (Rachel) [emphasis on COUNTERFORCE rationale]

What I have discussed here is only a tiny, but nonetheless illustrative, fraction of the full gamut of image schemas that empower interviewees’ reciprocal relations with beloveds.

11.3. Cultural Meaning-Templates of Reciprocity

In organic tandem with biographical / schematic factors, interviewees’ everyday exposures to cultural meaning-templates also help to mould their reciprocal experiences. For starters, the general concept of reciprocity has in itself been a long-standing “central feature of human relationships” (Eastwick & Finkel 2009, p. 1333). In particular, the idea of mutual exchange “has been a social norm throughout Western civilization … [that] creates a moral obligation that must be discharged if the recipients are to maintain their self-respect and the respect of others” (Young 2011, n.p.). This norm has been historically linked to practices of gift-giving that can be traced as far back to Hebrew Biblical texts (Gudme 2013), Homeric poems and Hellenistic inscriptions (Gygax 2013), the public / private lives of early imperial Romans (Coffee 2013), amongst other artefacts / activities of many major Western epochs.206 More recently, reciprocity is a prominent feature amidst ongoing vernacular / formal discussions on religion (e.g. Tullberg 2012), economics (e.g. Fehr & Gächter 2000), politics (e.g. Kertzer & Rathbun 2015; Watson 2007), evolutionary theory (e.g. Bowles & Gintis 2011), philosophy (e.g. Becker 1986), social psychology (e.g. Cook & Rice 2006; Cropanzano & Mitchell 2005), friendship (e.g. Chan 2011; Keramat 2015), and even romantic love (e.g. Ben-Zeév 2008; Carlson & Rose 2007; Eastwick et al. 2007; Luo & Zhang 2009; Ream 2010) – to name but a few contexts. Nuanced definitions aside, such discussions and more have contributed in some form or another to the modern definition of reciprocity as “the practice of exchanging things with others for mutual benefit” (‘Reciprocity’ 2016, n.p.).207

206 See Gill, Postlethwaite & Seaford (eds 1998) and Satlow (ed. 2013) for more thorough historical expositions on Western reciprocity.

207 In some instances, this is coupled with the sedimented belief that “without reciprocity, it’s a zero-sum game … [from which] there is no relationship” (Llopis 2016, n.p.).
Here, I propose the total impact of all the above handed-down influences has perhaps stirred
interviewees’ own understandings of their reciprocal relations with beloveds. The following
responses seem to reveal many parallels:

Honestly, I think, as a couple … yeah, it’s important to be fair … I don’t think – no, I can’t
imagine she’d take too kindly to me … [if] I just gave her nothing in return – just zero initiative
… lost in my own world, not caring … I’d be a terrible partner. (Dan) [emphasis on reciprocity
as a moral obligation / maintaining self-respect]

Ain’t right carin’ only for myself, mate … [A] good relationship’s ’bout workin’ two ways …
Ain’t no other right way. (Ben) [emphasis on reciprocity as a moral relational obligation]

Like, I reckon we play on both our strengths, ya know? … We each got legit blind spots and
stuff … [but] ya know, [when] we help each other … we kinda tend to do better and stuff … for
some things anyway. (Fiona) [emphasis on mutual benefits of reciprocity]

I’d say, um – we definitely highlight … [and] nurture the good in one another … That’s what I
feel. (Rachel) [emphasis on mutual benefits of reciprocity]

Western ideals of justice have traditionally been conjoined with reciprocity. As Johnston explains:

… the principle ideas about justice … have seized the imaginations of people in the “western”
world over the course of its recorded history. The oldest and probably the most widely endorsed
understanding of justice focuses … on the characteristics of relations among persons. This
understanding is rooted in the concept of reciprocity, a concept which is malleable enough to
have been shaped and embellished over the centuries into a considerable range of elaborated
conceptions of justice, but which retains a core meaning that ties together all those conceptions
as members of a single extended family of ideas. (2011, p. 2)

He goes on to specify that “for the first 1,500 years or more of recorded history, human beings’
ideas about justice were based heavily on the concept of reciprocity” (Johnston 2011, p. 3). This
ancient cultural meaning-template was appropriated by Greek philosophers such as Plato and
Aristotle, who further influenced the musings of Augustine, Aquinas, Hobbes, Kant, Mill, Rawls,
and other later thinkers (Pomerleau 2016). These historical dialogues were predominantly
focused on the political spheres of human life. However, more recent commonplace disseminations
have seen such “theories of fairness and justice … increasingly applied to close relationships
[including romantic partnerships] … [guiding] the ideas that people have about right and wrong,
about how we should or ought to behave, and about what we are entitled to” (Kluwer 2009, p. 591;
see also Lerner & Mikula eds, 1994). This observation is supported by multiple studies on
relational justice / reciprocity (e.g. Clarke & Mills 2012; Hatfield, Rapson & Aumer-Ryan 2008;

---

208 See Johnston (2011) and Sandel (ed. 2007) for more detailed historical accounts of Western justice.
Sprecher & Schwartz 1994) that seem to indicate most modern Western persons as being “profoundly concerned with how rewarding, fair, and equitable their budding [romantic] relationships are” (Hatfield, Rapson & Aumer-Ryan 2008, p. 424).

These environmental conditions appear to have quietly veered interviewees to see their reciprocities with beloveds as ‘justifiably’ fair, equal, balanced, etc. That being said, I opine that possible cultural meaning-template overlays with altruism (as discussed in the last chapter) have partly led them to, on one hand, avoid rigid score-keeping (i.e. selflessness), and on another, seek a degree of expressive equality (i.e. simultaneous concerns with justice). Fiona and Ben’s descriptions seem to lend weight to this:

I reckon, like – I’m super low-maintenance … I legit don’t need him to call or text me every day … I don’t want him to feel … [like] he owes me anything … [and] make him feel bogged down and pressured and stuff … I’m not so selfish … That’s not my intention, ya know? … [But] ya know, I reckon, like – we still gotta feel mutual … I can’t be bugging him for attention and all that … Our relationship’s a two-way street, ya know? … It’s not fair … [if] I was, like – I’m the only one putting in time … Doesn’t work that way, sorry. (Fiona)

I’m doin’ lots for her over the years, mate … I ain’t keepin’ count or nothin’ … It’s my pleasure makin’ her happy … So long things … ain’t lopsided – I’m all good, mate. (Ben) [emphasis on intermingling notions of altruism / justice]

Whilst synoptic, this section adequately shows how interviewees’ individualised / image schematic meanings of reciprocity are not asocial – but rather, are concurrently evolved via their embodied embeddedness within their milieus.

11.4. Conclusion

Reciprocity is pivotal to interviewees’ ‘ideal’ states of ‘being in love’ with partners. This shared quality is largely made up of their: 1) exchanges of physical gifts / thematic expressions – the latter being much more crucial than the former, 2) evaluative flexibilities, wherein deeds / gestures of self-growth, friendship, attraction, and altruism are taken as roughly equal qualitative currencies amidst two-way tradings, 3) valuations of words / actions as valid representations of super-ordinate themes – with actions being especially indicative of ‘true’ reciprocity, 4) beliefs that ‘real’ mutuality is voluntarily self-initiated, free from pressures to do so, 5) strivings for relational fairness, based on how much (not how many times) thematic expressions are exchanged, 6) restraints from *quo pro quo* over-calculativeness amidst desires for estimate equality (i.e.
balancing between excessive fairness and unfairness), 7) temporally traversing gauges of reciprocity inferred over longer periods, rather than single moments / contexts, 8) simultaneous views of reciprocity as an exchange of other super-ordinate themes, and a heralded form of relationality in its own right, 9) efforts to avoid negative reciprocity (i.e. tradings of hurt, insults, etc.), and 10) gratitude, implying their impressions of being fortunate enjoyers of partners’ thematic expressions. All these experiences are meaningfully flourished via a continuous flow of biographical influences, expanded embodied patterns, and cultural meaning-templates.

I have up until this point explored the core experiential components that make up interviewees’ optimal moments of ‘being in love’. However, the next chapter details how felt declines in any of the five super-ordinate themes may lead to unideal conditions amidst their intimate relations.
I have hitherto examined interviewees’ multifaceted experiences of self-growth, friendship, attraction, altruism, and reciprocity. Individually, these super-ordinate themes stand as unique phenomena on their own terms. However, together, they make up interviewees’ most ideal moments of ‘being in love’ – that is, their most favourable or optimal states of loving their partners. As clarified at the beginning of Part B, these formative qualities do not necessarily need to happen at once, but rather, are ascertained across what each person deems to be a reasonable time-frame to him / her. This discerning process comprises his / her cyclically-elaborative reflections on past, more recent, and future interactions with beloveds.

All this being said, it is crucial to point out that interviewees’ loving relations are not always quintessential. Quite the opposite, they often speak of times where the “goin’ gets rough” (Ben) from which “loving him … [can be] like, a legit pain in the ass” (Fiona). Here are a few examples of such instances:

Well, sometimes we just miscommunicate … It doesn’t happen often … [but when it does] I think she just stresses me out … I don’t want to argue with her, honestly … I just start to zone out … [and] sometimes, what she says – I think, honestly, she just adds fuel to the fire … I just try to step back … [and] take a time-out. (Dan)

Like, I reckon Jack doesn’t know when to stop … He’s too playful, ya know? … He, like – he legit doesn’t take things seriously … [as] he should, for someone his age … I reckon, like – I get pretty annoyed … [at him] when he’s like that and stuff … It’s okay to be chilled and all that … [but] not all the time, ya know? … Not for some stuff. (Fiona)

Mate, other day we’re yellin’ at each other … top of our lungs … She’s throwin’ my stuff ‘round the place, like they’re nothin’… Tossin’ shit everywhere! … I fuckin’ took some of her fuckin’ letters … [and] I’m hangin’ ‘em over the balcony, sayin’ I’m tossin’ her shit, too … Lots of yellin’ and shit … We’re both blowin’ our heads. (Ben)

Um, I’d say – well, Steve – I feel he doesn’t … always get where I’m coming from? … I feel he feels I’m very meek … He really feels I’m a pushover to some people … There’s moments –
well, he tries to lecture me … Usually I feel, wow – he’s being extremely condescending … I tell him – I say, “Mind your own beeswax!” … Yeah, definitely – I really don’t feel the need to act alpha … There’s nothing wrong with that. (Rachel) [emphasis on impoverished instances of ‘being in love’]

This chapter explores some of the common causes, effects, and outcomes of these unideal moments of ‘being in love’.

12.1. Experiential Themes of Unideal Moments of ‘Being in Love’

An eclectic range of triggers incite interviewees’ feelings of impoverished loving. These include “huge misunderstandings” (Dan), being “super legit annoyed … [by] how he was talking” (Fiona), “buttin’ heads with her”, (Ben), and “not seeing eye to eye at all” (Rachel) – to list but a mere few. The following responses offer some contextual elaboration:

I think our biggest misunderstanding lately … [is] probably her still just thinking I don’t like her mum … Well, I think, honestly, I’m just not the biggest fan … [but] that’s not the same as … outright not liking her … I know she’s close to her mum … [but] I think her mum – I think, she just comes in the way sometimes … [and] just tries to make Jane’s decisions for her … Honestly, we just get into a row – I think, almost every time I bring it up. (Dan)

Jack’s this irritating way of saying things … Like, I reckon – maybe we’re arguing and stuff like that … [and] he’ll keep asking questions, like, ya know … “Why are you so annoyed?”, “What’s your problem?” … “Why are you so worked up?” – why this, why that … I’m, like – I reckon if he shuts up and listen … he’ll stop needing to ask, ya know? … I’m legit annoyed … [by] how he keeps talking and talking. (Fiona)

Ain’t a secret, mate … She and me – most folks know … we got two fuckin’ huge egos, size of globes … [So] we’re clashin’, some days … She’s thinkin’ she’s right, I’m thinkin’ I’m fuckin’ right … [and] none of us – we ain’t budgin’ any inch … Ain’t so bad these days … We’re learnin’ to calm down and shit … [but our] old habits – they ain’t dyin’ overnight, mate … Ain’t the easiest thing – breakin’ through to me or her. (Ben)

Um, I’d say – well, we’re mostly very similar … I’d say, ninety percent? … Uh, the rest – we really don’t see things … a hundred percent the same … I really think he likes to feel … [like] he’s a forerunner … He really likes to feel in charge … [in] what he’s good in … I really feel, well – as long as he’s happy, right? … [But] I really don’t like it … [when] he expects me … to be the same … [when] I really, um – I’m really not keen to stand out … [and] put myself out there … not all the time, anyway. (Rachel)

On the surface, these kinds of incitements are exceedingly varied in nature, spread out over diverse situations. However, I interpret all of them actually share a common experiential feature – namely,
they involve interviewees’ impressions of declining super-ordinate expressions (of one or more types) that, in effect, engender their unideal experiences of ‘being in love’. For instance, Fiona recalls how upset she felt with Jack when he did not seem to show much concern during the time "Chuchi [my cat] had to be put down". Phenomenologically, this penurious situation appears to stem from Jack’s abeyances of reciprocal altruism. This fermented Fiona’s beliefs that he was not empathetically looking out for her personal well-being in the same way she often does for him. Dan, Ben, and Rachel also allude to comparable imaginative links between weakened loving and thematic declines:

Yeah, I think … she’s not the most responsible person, sometimes … Honestly, it doesn’t happen often … [but] say, something we plan messes up … she blames me, just a little bit more than she should … I get quite irritated … I just think – end of the day … it just takes … a while to convince and show her … she just might have messed up … I don’t think … she shows she’s always willing … to take full responsibility … I just wish she would, a little bit more. (Dan) [emphasis on a thematic decline in emotional attraction (i.e. disparities between conceptions / representations of ideational responsibility)]

She’s knowin’ … I’m quittin’ my bad shit, mate – drinkin’, drugs, shit like that … [But the] other day’s she’s askin’ me … [to] split money for buyin’ a stash with her … Ain’t a good influence, mate … She ain’t encouragin’ me the right ways … [when] she’s bein’ like that … I’m tellin’ her – “Quit doin’ that shit to me!” … She ain’t lookin’ out for me … [or] helpin’ me be better … [when] she’s doin’ that … I ain’t doin’ that temptin’ shit to her – so why’s she tryin’ it with me? (Ben) [emphasis on thematic declines in reciprocity / self-growth / altruism (i.e. lack of mutuality / counteracting virtuous improvement / detractions from subjective goodness)]

Um, well – I’d say, I really don’t like prying … I really try to mind my own business … [But] I’d say – he doesn’t clue me in … [on] a few things I feel, uh – maybe I should know? … I found out the other day, from his friend … [that] he’s really going through a lot of stress [at work] … [and] he’s thinking of quitting … He didn’t tell me … It was really the first I’d heard … I really feel, um – well, he’s very open with a lot of things … [but] he doesn’t open up on some things like that … I really felt – well, he could tell his friend – why not me? (Rachel) [emphasis on a thematic decline in friendship (i.e. reduced relational exclusivity)]

However, interviewees are quick to clarify that the above kinds of unwanted circumstances are usually fleeting, rarely lasting for any considerable amount of time. To this extent, they suggest any intermittent and / or short-lived dips in thematic expressions seldom undermine their overall senses of being ideally ‘in love’. That is to say, one-off disagreements, arguments, etc. may entail

209 Such declines are ultimately relational, subject to each interviewee’s individual senses of reduced thematic expressions in comparison to prevalent (i.e. ‘normal’) qualitative levels within his / her partnership. What constitutes as prevalent is thus heavily based on his / her prior interactions with beloveds (i.e. thematic levels he / she is most used to) – but is also partly derived from his / her general conceptions of what ideal love should feel like (i.e. from lifelong learnings / expectations).

210 This may include interviewees’ broad thematic notions (e.g. friendship, reciprocity, etc.) and / or their more nuanced qualities (e.g. empathy, chemistry, etc.)
temporary regressions in super-ordinate qualities. Yet, to them, these passing acrimonies are often not enough to derail their general (i.e. broader, overarching, etc.) feelings of optimal loving.\textsuperscript{211} For example, Rachel says Steve’s hesitance in sharing his worries “really upset me … [for] a while … [because] I couldn’t work pass … why he wouldn’t tell me”. Regardless, her ephemeral confusion rapidly subsided once she “sat down with him … [to] listen to him”. This greatly helped to restore her emotional attraction to its ‘normal’ state. Throughout this assuaging process, she never felt alienated from her ideal state of ‘being in love’ – simply “a bit sad … [but] only for a day, really”.

Other interviewees voice congruent experiences:

I mean, honestly – most fights we have, they’re nothing … We barely even get mad at each other, hardly … End of the day, I think, yeah -- there’s times we miscommunicate or misunderstand …. [but] most times, yeah – we put it behind us in no time … Nah, it doesn’t take anything from our love … I don’t get that affected … [especially] over anything so petty. (Dan)

Like, okay – I reckon, Jack’s annoying … [but] he doesn’t always mean it … I reckon, like – it’s his defense mechanism and stuff, ya know? … I’m also kinda annoying (laughs) … I reckon I do kinda get heated up … [but] I never feel I love him any less … We fight, we hug, we say “I love you” … [and] legit let things go, ya know? … No grudges or bad vibes or whatever. (Fiona)

Mate, we’re kickin’ up … shitstorms all the time … Ain’t anythin’ new – just us bein’ dramatic little shits … Ain’t makin’ me … doubt she’s my Number One … Fightin’s just fightin’, mate – ain’t nothin’ most folks ain’t already doin’ … I ain’t takin’ that to heart most days … she ain’t, too … We’re blowin’ our tops and shit … [but] that ain’t meanin’ I’m lovin’ her different, mate … Ain’t crossin’ my mind. (Ben) [emphasis on short-term conflicts that do not affect overall perceptions of ideal loving]

Problems nonetheless do start to arise when interviewees detect persistent thematic declines. Specifically, recessions in super-ordinate qualities that stretch beyond one-off events (e.g. multiple disagreements on the same issue, longer-standing arguments, etc.) may start to erode their ideal loving conditions.\textsuperscript{212} This erosion does not necessarily imply a complete alienation from ‘being in love’ per se, but rather, aggravates less-than-optimal affectionate states impinged by various negative reactions.\textsuperscript{213} For example, Ben recalls a significant period of time where Sarah did not seem to “give much of a fuck … ‘bout the shit I was toleratin’ … [with] folks ‘round me” (i.e.

\textsuperscript{211} However, sudden thematic declines that are felt by interviewees to be unacceptably severe (to be discussed) may instantly impinge upon their ideal loving conditions for a foreseeable future. For instance, Fiona expects herself to be “super pissed off … [and] legit heartbroken … [for] a long time” should she ever discover Jack to be ‘cheating’ on her (i.e. immediate regressions of reciprocity / physical attraction, swiftly followed by far-reaching debased endearments).

\textsuperscript{212} Certain situations notwithstanding (see footnote above), interviewees generally predict that the longer thematic declines are left unrectified, the more impoverished and / or pronounced their unideal loving states become.

\textsuperscript{213} I will cover some of these negative reactions further below.
extensive decays in reciprocal altruism (returned empathy)). This caused him to get “fuckin’ frustrated” (i.e. negative reaction) which only served to reify his then-beliefs that something “ain’t right … ‘bout us back then, mate” (i.e. unideal loving), even as he stayed ‘in love’ with her. Dan, Fiona, and Rachel disclose similar experiences amidst previously incessant thematic declines – albeit expressing different, but still adverse, reactions.

I think, yeah – she used to be a bit more hot-headed, compared to now … Honestly, we’d be doing great most times, before that … [but] suddenly, she just started lashing out at me – sometimes for no reason, quite a few times … She just wasn’t handling the stress [of her school] well … [so] I took the bullet … Honestly – it wasn’t the best side of her I’d seen … I’ve seen her have better days … Nah, I don’t think – she wasn’t that bad or anything … [but when] she took things out on me – I’d just feel confused … [and] just quite peeved, too … I think it did affect us somewhat … There was some strain, for a while … I wasn’t exactly stoked … It was like walking on eggshells. (Dan) [emphasis on sustained thematic declines in self-growth (i.e. waning idealisation of beloved) / negative reactions (i.e. confusion, irritation) / unideal loving]

Jack’s kinda flirty … Still is … [but] I reckon, like – he used to be worse and stuff … Ya know, we were only starting out so, like – I kinda didn’t know what to expect and all that … He was normal at first … [but] after a while, he got down to flirting … with other girls – pretty ones, just a little … I reckon I’d get pretty much jealous … I took it as, like – he wasn’t attracted to me, he’s lost interest … [so] he’s checking out other girls and stuff … He’s better now, I reckon – actually, he’s a good boy now (laughs) … [But] ya know, early on – I legit wasn’t happy … I hate feeling, like – I’m not pretty enough for him and all … I was, like – I’d be legit thinking the relationship kinda wasn’t worth it. (Fiona) [emphasis on sustained thematic declines in reciprocal attraction (i.e. lack of returned physical allurement) / negative reactions (i.e. jealousy, unhappiness, unattractiveness) / unideal loving]

Well, I’d say, uh – I feel we’d really … always had heaps of chemistry … [then] um, I feel maybe we were really doing too much of the same things, too repetitive? … [So] um, we really, maybe – we lost a bit of our spark for a while … [from] having the same routine … [off] going to the same places, doing the same things, nearly all the time … Um, well, I won’t say we had any really terrible times … [but] maybe we were kinda bored for a while, maybe a bit stale? … I really don’t feel we were at our finest. (Rachel) [emphasis on sustained thematic declines in reciprocal friendship (i.e. diminishing chemistry) / negative reactions (i.e. boredom, staleness) / unideal loving]

Amidst such unideal situations, interviewees recount their habits of looking back on and / or wishing for more optimal instances of ‘being in love’ with partners.²¹⁴ This often creates ‘discordance’. I use this term as a shorthand for their perceptions of qualitative discrepancies between ideal / unideal loving that, in effect, make them feel experientially inhibited from what their partnerships ‘ought to be like’ (sans thematic declines).²¹⁵ Fiona and Ben explain:

²¹⁴ These nostalgic / future-oriented reflections emerge from each interviewee’s personal discernments of prior ideal loving moments with beloveds – which then work as points of experiential comparison.

²¹⁵ This leads to varying degrees of imaginative yearning that compel interviewees to long for ‘better times’ for partners.
Like, our not-so-good times … I reckon, ya know, when we hit a rough patch … I legit notice something’s up … [like] we’re not in sync and stuff, ya know? … We don’t talk as much … [or] like, we lose our tempers easily and stuff like that … I hate that feeling … I reckon I’m wanting things … to be better like before. (Fiona)

Ain’t forgettin’ – we’re arguin’ … [like] a bunch of fucktards … almost two weeks … Real shitstorm of a time, mate … Not our greatest hit … I ain’t admittin’ it to her [at] that time … [but] I was missin’ her like crazy … I’m missin’ her company … [and] missin’ gettin’ back to normal, mate. (Ben) [emphasis on discordances between ideal / unideal loving]

At times, interviewees’ troubling discordances may increasingly perturb other spheres of their lives beyond their romantic partnerships. Dan, for instance, talks about a time where Jane’s year-long overseas education meant fewer conversations with each other – mostly due to her being “extremely busy … [and] too distracted to talk”. This prolonged thematic decline in reciprocal attraction (i.e. reduction in returned emotional allurement) prompted his deep desire for more ideal loving relations with her (i.e. discordance). Consequently, he soon found himself less motivated to interact with other friends, falling into a saddened state that also distracted him from work (i.e. insidious perturbance). Dan is not alone.216

[When] we legit argue – a big one … I obsess and stuff, ya know? … I reckon, like – I run over things in my head … again and again and again … [and] then I get mad at him… [or] I get sad and stuff … [and] I legit can’t pay attention … to anything I’m doing. (Fiona)

My days’ goin’ to shits … [if] we’re fightin’ for too long, mate … I’m short with most folks, too … Ain’t no one wantin’ to be around me … My life ain’t feelin’ right … [until] we’re settlin’ down … [and] sortin’ shit out. (Ben)

Um, I’d say – well, I feel I’m really good … [with] separating my relationship life … from my professional life … [but] I really feel – yeah, definitely – [when] I feel there’s an issue … hanging over our heads … I’m still prone to feeling sad in general … [and] really oversensitive to everything. (Rachel) [emphasis on context-traversing perturbance]

Interviewees’ discordances vary in their intensities. This variation seems to be predicated on two overlaying evaluative routes. The first route centers on Heideggerian notions of existential-spatial nearness, as first covered in Chapter 8. In this case, the more interviewees mull over any perceived discordances (i.e. increased mental foregrounding), the more intense their inhibitions from ideal

---

216 Interviewees do not necessary experience the same extent of perturbance vis-à-vis felt discordances. For instance, Fiona admits to “let[t]ing things get to me way too much” (i.e. wide-spanning perturbance) whilst Rachel is better able to “compartmentalise … what’s happening with us” (i.e. narrower perturbance). Regardless, all interviewees expressed at least some extent of having other life-areas affected during moments of extensive thematic decline. Additionally, the negative reactions that ensue from perturbances are not always the same. Dan, for instance, conveys more memories of sadness, with Ben describing greater anger.
loving start to feel (i.e. progressively distinct discrepancy between optimal and unideal states). Dan alludes to this observation:

> Our biggest challenge – I think, that was when she was overseas … We barely spoke … [so] we just weren’t that connected … I think, I just pondered a lot … I just didn’t feel good about the whole thing … I was thinking more and more … [about whether] we’re actually okay – with the distance, with everything … Yeah, I think – I did struggle … I just kept thinking, yeah – the longer we weren’t together … I just felt we weren’t the same … Things felt different between us. (Dan) [emphasis on increasing Heideggerian nearness / greater discordant intensity]

A second evaluation route pertains to the severity of thematic declines. This entails each interviewee’s personal gauges of the qualitative extent in which expressions of self-growth, friendship, etc. have strayed from the relational ‘norm’ he / she is used to. In this regard, more severe deviations imply worsening super-ordinate regressions that, in effect, bring about more intense discords (i.e. an especially emphatic exclusion from ideal loving).

Jack does his own stuff … [and] I also do my own stuff … [so] like, it’s not like we’re joined at the hips or anything, ya know? … We’ve our own lives … [but] I reckon, like – sometime back … we were kinda maybe too isolated from one another … We didn’t go out … [and] didn’t do much of the same stuff together … [So] I kinda – I suggested to him a few times, “Hey, let’s do something together” … [but] he kinda shrugged me off, like he couldn’t be bothered and stuff … I was legit annoyed at his attitude … We used to do a lot together … [and] now we barely do anything as a couple, like we used to … We were getting worse … I thought, ya know – we were getting less and less involved like we were … [and] he legit wasn’t helping … I reckon our relationship – that’s, like – that’s probably one of our lowest points. (Fiona) [emphasis on increasingly severe deviations from the relational ‘norm’ of reciprocal friendship (i.e. declining similarity of interests, activities, etc.) / greater discordant intensity]

Thus far, many of the excerpts I have shared seem to largely cast beloveds as sole culprits of unideal conditions of ‘being in love’. However, it is crucial to note that interviewees also at times see themselves as prime or mutual perpetuators of these unwanted conditions. This is mostly due to their own restraints in thematic expressions. For instance, Rachel remembers her occasional struggles with “letting down my walls with Steve” when it came to “really opening up … [about] some stuff that happened with my family”. This partial withholding of reciprocal friendship (i.e. absence of full self-authenticity) made her start to question if she was “really ready to … love and trust someone … as much as I wanted to” (i.e. inhibited from ideal loving conditions). She ultimately attributes such feelings to her own hesitance, not Steve’s, since “he was really trying his best … [to] be patient with me”. Other interviewees share similar self-responsibilities:

---

217 Attuned to Footnote 209, what is deemed as ‘normal’ is fostered via each interviewee’s biographical assessments / expectations of the salient thematic interactions of his / her relationship.

218 Further to this, greater discordant intensities seem to beget more context-traversing perturbances.
Honestly, end of the day – I’m half to blame … for the whole situation … I just thought, back then – I assumed she wasn’t trying hard enough … [to] talk, to stay in touch … [but] yeah, I just didn’t really consider … just how genuinely busy she was … with her school work … I was just being selfish, honestly – just, I think, I wasn’t thinking beyond myself … [so] yeah, I blame myself as well – just letting things affect us … more than it needed to. (Dan)

Like, I reckon Jack was being legit too lazy … [to] bother to do anything together … [but] I mean, ya know – I also didn’t help things and stuff … I was too busy, too … [and] to me, like – I know myself … I know I legit wasn’t … putting in a hundred percent effort on my part … [So] I don’t only see it as his fault or anything like that, ya know? … I reckon, like – it was my fault, too. (Fiona)

She used to be always tellin’ me, many times – I ain’t understandin’ where she’s comin’ from … She’s right, mate … I ain’t the most sensitive bloke … Not always so perfect knowin’ what she’s feelin’ … [or what] her emotions are … I’m gettin’ better at readin’ her, mate … [but] I’m knowin’ it’s me many times … [for] not gettin’ her … [and] makin’ her feel I ain’t showin’ her proper love. (Ben) [emphasis on interviewees’ own / mutual responsibilities for various super-ordinate declines]

I briefly mentioned earlier how interviewees’ unideal loving situations come with diverse negative reactions. Here, I elaborate further by adding that what these reactions are depends on a few factors. This includes, amongst other things, which super-ordinate themes are thought by them to be wanting, who interviewees regard as primarily to blame, and how intense ensuing discordances feel. There is of course not enough room here to detail every single one of interviewees’ described reactions. Nonetheless, the following responses capture a few of the more consistently cited ones:

I think, yeah – I’m quite prone … [to] blaming myself for things … Honestly, I think to myself, I do my best to support her … [but] I think I wasn’t always there for her … [in] how she wanted me to be … I don’t think I’ve always been as empathetic as I could have been … [especially] when she had a big falling out with her friends … The way I see it – I think, I was offering her solutions … [but] I don’t think I was just letting her rant and get things off her chest … I was just too judgy, trying to be objective … [when] that wasn’t what she was looking for … She tried telling me … [but] I think, honestly – I just took her the wrong way … I took it as – I just thought she didn’t appreciate me trying to support her … I was way too oversensitive … took things too personally … Nah, I don’t think it was a major issue … [but] yeah – I don’t think I was as loving … [as] I needed to be. (Dan) [emphasis on wanting altruism (i.e. ineffective empathy) / self-attributed / mild discordance / negative reactions of self-blame and oversensitivity]

I told you, for real – we used to be both kinda self-indulgent and stuff … … I reckon, like – we were kinda influencing one another, not in the most positive kinda way, ya know? … We kinda didn’t take any responsibility … [and] didn’t really respect each other and stuff … It kinda made me pretty selfish … like, I was legit too demanding – kinda expecting everything my way … Him, too – he was kinda the same … I reckon, like – we weren’t a disaster or anything … [but] we

---

219 Most of interviewees’ negative reactions – including anger, paranoia, selfishness, and so on – are worthy of their own detailed phenomenological analysis. However, doing this falls outside the investigative purview of the current thesis.
I feel, well, um – he’s very much better now … [but] I feel, maybe – he used to be a bit of a know-it-all? … Well, I used to, uh – I’d feel really annoyed … [when] he’s speak down to me … unintentionally, really … It was mostly his tone? … I’d feel hurt … [by] how he’d say I should do something in this way or that way … [and] didn’t really, well – I felt … he didn’t give me … room to react … [and] do things like how I wanted to … I really feel – I’d say, it definitely wasn’t my happiest time in our relationship. (Rachel) [emphasis on receding reciprocal altruism (i.e. imposed subjective goodness) / partner attributed / strong discordance / negative reactions of annoyance and hurt]

At first glance, these negative reactions appear highly disparate. However, I interpret that they are all discreetly united by a common experiential thread. Specifically, each of them seems to instigate interviewees to re-evaluate what it means to ideally ‘be in love’ with their partners. This imaginative process assumes multiple nuanced forms. For instance, Rachel conveys previous thematic declines in friendship, mostly due to Steve and her “aiming for very different lifestyles” (i.e. diminished interpersonal similarities). This unideal period of their relationship caused her to sometimes re-evaluate if “we’re as alike … [as] I felt we were?” (i.e. scrutinising the veracity of prior ideal experiences). Meanwhile, Dan – referring again to his self-perceived past struggles with altruism (i.e. misguided empathy) – believes such thematic hindrances stirred him to re-evaluate what an optimal state of loving should be like (i.e. adjusting his definitions / actions in response to his partner). Other re-evaluative forms include, but are not restricted to:

I’m learnin’ now, mate … I’m knowin’ better what’s settin’ her off … [so] I’m stayin’ away [from] doin’ … [and] sayin’ shit [that’s] makin’ her lose her cool … [or] makin’ her think I ain’t lovin’ her right … I’m still fuckin’ up time to time … [but] I’m tryin’ … [It’s] my way of keepin’ peace, mate … Ain’t wantin’ to affect our good days … sayin’ somethin’ proper stupid – like I’m always doin’ …No point makin’ her and me mad, fightin’ for no reason … [So] I’m bein’ more careful, thinkin’ before I’m speakin’. (Ben) [emphasis on a re-evaluation of ideal loving via a partial minimising of conflict]

I reckon, ya know – after our last legit fight … I did some soul-searching and stuff … I realise – like, I reckon it’s important for me … to remember … he and I – we’re in this relationship together … I reckon what I want and what he wants – it doesn’t matter if I’m happy and he isn’t … [or] he’s happy and I’m, like – I’m legit not feeling it … We need to be a team … [and] work together … [to] solve any issues and stuff we have – ya know, big or small issues and all that …
Like, us doing that – I reckon it’s very important … [so] we can grow our relationship more … [and] stay solid, as a couple. (Fiona) [emphasis on a re-evaluation of ideal loving as a continuously collaborative effort]

Up until this point, I have presented distinctions between ideal and unideal moments of ‘being in love’. However, a crucial clarification needs to be made. In particular, I propose interviewees are wont to fluidly include both conditions as crucial aspects of ‘really’ loving their beloveds. That is to say, they consistently stress that challenging moments with partners are just as important to authentically defining ‘true love’ as their more quintessential experiences.\(^{220}\) The proceeding remarks help to introduce this pivotal theme:

Yeah, both of us – we believe in God … We believe He’s a plan for all of us … [but] I don’t think, nah – I don’t think that means … we just sit back … [and] take things for granted … End of the day, life’s messy … [It’s] hard, challenging – things are inconvenient … Honestly, that’s just a natural part of being alive … I think, yeah – being in love with Jane – I don’t think … it’s not any different … We’ve our great moments – but, yeah, we also argue – it’s just normal … We’re happy … We fight … I think, end of the day – that’s just part and parcel of really being in love with someone … Love’s messy, just like life. (Dan)

Like, I reckon, Jack’s annoying as hell – sure … I’m kinda always saying he is, ya know? … I tell everyone he rubs my nerves, once in a while … [but] like – I legit wouldn’t trade our relationship for the world … We’ve been together for ages … I reckon, like – okay, we aren’t perfect … We get legit annoyed at one another and stuff … [but] we’ve so many good memories together … I reckon, like – I don’t ever doubt our love’s real, ya know? … It all adds up … [and] I truly love him … more than any other stupid ex-boyfriend or whoever … They don’t even come close. (Fiona)

Ain’t sayin’ it any other way, mate … I ain’t second guessin’ I’m lovin’ Sarah … with all my heart … [That’s] sayin’ a lot, mate – a proper bludger like me, sayin’ that … I ain’t never expectin’ anythin’ less … [than] us blowin’ up at each other … [We’ve] always been fuckin’ shithheads, me and her … Ain’t anythin’ new … I’m knowin’ all this from the start … [and] I’m still lovin’ her – all of her … She’s still makin’ me feel happy – nearly all the days, mate … I’m knowin’ she’s my true love. (Ben)

I genuinely love Steve … He’s my twin flame … I feel it, I know it … As in, um – I’d say, I really love who he is … [so] I really face everything about him, the plus and minuses … [and] I face the same … with myself, too … I’m sure – well, I don’t pick and choose only the things I love about our relationship … We aren’t perfect … We bring our own baggage – we’ve conflicts … [but] I feel, well – that’s the whole point, right? … Our love’s everything we share. (Rachel) [emphasis on inclusion of ideal / unideal moments in defining authentic loving]

\(^{220}\) In this regard, interviewees tend to treat both wanting and peak conditions of ‘being in love’ as relationally elaborative of each other. For instance, Ben sees his past discordances and negative reactions as a ‘natural’ part of “learnin’ to appreciate … our happy days more” (i.e. unideal moments informing his treasuring of ideal ones). At the same time, Dan claims his previously impoverished interactions with Jane felt “so terrible … [because] I thought we’d … fallen so far … [from] how we ought to be” (i.e. ideal instances shaping unideal discordant intensities). To this degree, I suggest these dual aspects of ‘being in love’ play intertwining roles in flourishing interviewees’ overall meanings of genuine endearment.
Beyond mere inclusion, such views essentially reflect interviewees broader beliefs that ‘real love’ must be composed of “bad times … [with] the good” (Dan), insofar as “you really need to go through the grinder with someone … [to] truly say you love them, completely” (Rachel). Put simply, then, it is only by enduring and overcoming arduous moments with beloveds that interviewees feel they are able to live out the ‘actual’ meaning of ‘being in love’. Ben and Fiona sum up this critical observation.

Like, ya know – everyone says … you gotta kinda hit rock bottom to get back up and stuff … I believe in that, ya know? … We’ve been through a lot together … We’ve fought to the moon and back. (laughs) … The thing is, ya know – us hitting rock bottom … [and] not giving up – I reckon, like, it’s made us stronger and stuff … Like, we’ve proven our love’s for real … [otherwise] we’d call it quits so easily, long ago … We’ve both shown how much … we hold on to each other … We show we get back up … [through] hard times and stuff … That’s how I know we’re legit still really in love and all. (Fiona)

Mate, I ain’t buyin’ into … the whole Disney perfect love story shtuck … Most folks – they’re thinkin’ love’s ‘bout happily-ever-afters … Real love ain’t workin’ like that, mate … Real love’s ‘bout hustlin’ … [and] stickin’ it out … I’m knowin’ we really love each other … [because] we put up with both our shit … [and] we’re [still] gettin’ on proper solid, mate … I’m sayin’ – it’s meanin’ somethin’ … [that] we’re still in love … [and] ain’t broken up … [just] cause we ain’t some Disney shit. (Ben) [emphasis on the need to endure unideal instances of ‘being in love’ as part of its authentic occurrence]

The above endurances for authentic loving are nonetheless subject to two crucial conditions. First, interviewees emphasise that quintessential states of ‘being in love’ should, on the whole, remain much more experientially prevalent than thematically weakened instances. In other words, whilst super-ordinate declines are a nurturing facet in defining ‘true love’, such negative moments must stay marginal vis-à-vis the qualitative entirety of their interactions with beloveds. Anything beyond this individually-discerned marginality may in fact come to adversely impede ‘real’ lovingness.

Nah, I think, honestly, there’s always a limit … Way I see it, I just think it boils down to how we communicate … I think just fighting occasionally – it’s just normal … Most loving couples – we naturally do that … [But] I guess – I imagine, if we’re fighting nearly every single day … just arguing too much … [then] that’s surely not how love ought to be – something’s not right … I think, honestly – [if] that’s the case … we’d need to … figure out what’s wrong. (Dan)

---

221 By contrast, interviewees believe that selectively indulging in love’s quixotical aspects (sans embracing its unideal instances) is “unrealistic” (Dan), “not practical”, (Fiona), “dumb” (Ben), and “too idealistic” (Rachel). In other words, they imply such skewed focus inhibits anyone from ‘truly’ experiencing what ‘being in love’ is like – in all its fulfilling and unruly totality.

222 Again, what counts as prevalent depends on each interviewee’s varying gauges of relational ‘norms’ (as discussed) – and also his / her personal tolerances of unideal moments (e.g. the threshold in which thematic declines shift from necessary aspects of ‘true love’ to being ‘too much’ for comfort).
Jack and I – we’re fine … We seldom have legit serious fights … [so when] we do, we usually come out stronger and stuff … [but] like – I also feel … we shouldn’t be fighting too much and all … I’ve friends – some of them, I reckon – they fight with their boyfriends nearly every week or something … It’s ridiculous, ya know? … Why stay in a relationship … [if] they’re gonna have so much drama all the time? … I find it stupid … Like, there’s only so much anyone should take – up to a point … [where] ya know – things are obviously going really bad and stuff … I reckon, like – obviously, that’s not real love anymore … That’s mutual abuse. (Fiona) [emphasis on excessive thematic declines that do not contribute to authentic loving]

A second condition applies. Specifically, interviewees explain how unideal moments of ‘being in love’ are only key facets of ‘true’ loving to the extent they believe such instances remain resolvable in the near-future (e.g. subsiding conflicts, increased expressive efforts, lessening negative reactions due to mutual compromises, etc.). Conversely, whilst not yet happening, they anticipate any future discordances that appear far too difficult to assuage are likely to dwarf any concerns they have for authentic loving. Should such instances remain persistent, interviewees expect themselves to partake in affirmative actions, including (but not limited to) the possibility of dissolving their partnerships (i.e. ‘breaking up’).

Mate, I ain’t givin’ up so easily on things … I commit to somethin’ – I’m takin’ it seriously, know what I mean? … [But] I ain’t knowin’ the future … We’re truly lovin’ each other … [but] anythin’ happens … That’s life, mate … [if] we’re ever buttin’ heads so bad … [until] we ain’t feelin’ the same love … I m thinkin’, best to call it quits … Ain’t wantin’ to drag bad shit longer than needin’ to … [if] we’re so fucked up … [until] we’re hatin’ the sight of each other … [then that] ain’t real love no more … Ain’t gonna happen now – don’t want it to happen … [but] I’m sayin’, if it did – just gotta move on and shit. (Ben)

We’re always going to try our very best … [to] sort through any problems … I really feel, well – we’ve so much history as a couple … it’s really hard to imagine us not pulling through … Um, well, I guess I’d say … [if] there’s a really very big issue – maybe, um, he decides he doesn’t truly love me anymore … I’d be completely devastated … I mean, I really don’t think … there’s an easy workaround for that, I guess … It’ll have to be something very big like that … coming between us … [for us] to maybe think … [about] being apart. (Rachel) [emphasis on potentially unassailable discordances that counteract authentic love / considerations of affirmative action]

Akin to previous chapters, these defining experiences of interviewees’ unideal moments of ‘being in love’ are meaningfully rooted in image schemas, as I will now discuss.

---

223 During past unideal instances (i.e. back when they were still happening), interviewees recall worrying over their potential inabilities to diffuse them. However, as they claim, all of such prior issues have largely been resolved over time – and are thus now retrospectively valued as learning aspects of ‘really’ loving their partners.

224 Some alternative options are “taking some time off from each other” (Dan), “seeing other people for a while” (Fiona), “goin’ for counselling” (Ben), and “moving out of his place” (Rachel) – amongst other proposed affirmative actions.
12.2. Image Schemas of Unideal Moments of ‘Being in Love’

Interviewees’ moments of peak / enervated loving rely on implicit schematic structures. To begin with, their basic skills at categorising various experiences are latently indebted to CONTAINER (i.e. experiential CATEGORIES ARE CONTAINERS). This entails mentally including self-growth, friendship, etc. as facets of their optimal moments of ‘being in love’. Meanwhile, any expressive absences and / or counterintuitive gestures are perceived as falling outside of the figurative boundaries of this experiential category.

I think, what’s helped us stay in love … [is] how we’re also friends … [and] just, yeah – our natural chemistry. (Dan)

I reckon, like – we do care and motivate one another and stuff … That’s a big thing about our love. (Fiona)

Mate, bein’ a selfish fuck … ain’t showin’ proper love. (Ben)

Um, well – purposely trying to hurt him … [is] really not loving at all. (Rachel) [emphasis on experiential inclusions within / exclusions from the cognitively CONTAINED CATEGORY of ideal loving]

ITERATION – which Johnson defines as our bodily grasps of “repeat[ing] an action, or some subroutine within an action” (2007, p. 172) – seems to underlie interviewees’ detections of any thematic recessions. Here, the ITERATIONS at hand are technically routine inactions, insofar as they may notice partners’ and / or their own recurring (i.e. ITERATIVE) failures to express the defining qualities of ideal loving. Again, such processual recognitions initially appear highly abstract. Nonetheless, readers can notice that any ensuing meanings would be completely unfathomable without this structuring logic.

Honestly, there’s times now … I just let her rant, just as much as she wants, without judging … I don’t want to repeat … how I was before – being too logical. (Dan)

He kinda – like I said – we’d argue and he’ll always ask me … legit annoying questions, again and again … Totally not understanding. (Fiona)

I ain’t repeatin’ my old habits … [of] doin’ shit [that’s] makin’ her lose her cool. (Ben)

Uh, I recognise … [when] he’s acting holier-than-thou … He used to keep doing the same thing, very often … Not these days though. (Rachel) [emphasis on ITERATION-dependent reasoning]

Interviewees’ perceived discordances are propositionally bound to MATCHING – or more precisely, MISMATCHING. Together with CATEGORIES ARE CONTAINERS, I suggest this image schema quietly
frames their capacities to detect qualitative differences (i.e. MISMATCHING) between cognitively boundaried instances of ideal and unideal loving. Once more, such imaginative comparisons would be all but impossible if not for the embodied logics that enable them.

I think, yeah – we barely talked on Skype then … Probably once a week, probably less … I think – I just knew we just weren’t the same as before. (Dan)

Like, I reckon I legit straight-out told him … [that] we – like, we’d changed and stuff … [from] how we used to be … I’m not, like – I’m not gonna sit around and tolerate his flirting, ya know? (Fiona)

I’m knowin’ she wasn’t too happy with somethin’, mate … We’re actin’ different … ain’t like our normal way of lovin’. (Ben)

Uh, well – I’d say, he’s definitely adjusted the way he talks … He’s not like before … He’s much better, more willing to listen. (Rachel) [emphasis on creative extensions of MISMATCHING CATEGORICAL CONTAINERS]

Metaphorical projections of CENTRE-PERIPHERY, SCALE, and BLOCKAGE also partly inspire interviewees’ conceptions of discordant intensities. CENTRE-PERIPHERY subtends their allusions to thematic declines “loom[ing] larger in [their] experience[s]” (Johnson 1987, p. 124) – in this case, their mental foregrounding (i.e. CENTRAL focus) of ideal / unideal disparities. Meanwhile, creative conflations of SCALE / BLOCKAGE aid them in judging the deviating extent (i.e. SCALE of severity) of discordances that stem from expressive inhibitions (i.e. BLOCKAGE from relational ‘norms’).

I honestly think – yeah, I was just hyper-focusing on our problems, too much … I just couldn’t get the thoughts out of my head, couldn’t stop worrying. (Dan) [emphasis on CENTRE-PERIPHERY-dependent allusions]

I reckon, like – I hate obsessing … [whenever] he annoys me … I admit, ya know – in my mind, I kinda nit-pick at stuff … [and] can’t concentrate … [on] other stuff and all. (Fiona) [emphasis on CENTRE-PERIPHERY-dependent allusions]

Ain’t knowin’ why she was holdin’ back our intimacy, mate … Later on, she’s explainin’ why … [so] I’m understandin’ better now … [but] back then, I’m thinkin’, shit’s gettin’ worse and worse, mate. (Ben) [emphasis on BLOCKAGE / SCALE reasonings]

Uh, well, I feel we mostly had some bad communication for a bit … [that] wasn’t getting any better – kept deteriorating … I felt then – maybe he’d stopped being … [as] attentive as he used to be. (Rachel) [emphasis on SCALE / BLOCKAGE reasonings]

PART-WHOLE empowers interviewees’ in treating both their ideal / unideal loving states as essential aspects (i.e. PARTS) of their overall (i.e. WHOLE) experiences of ‘true love’. The same schema – in tandem with IMBALANCE – flourishes their desires for any thematic declines to remain a minimal facet (i.e. IMBALANCED PART) of the entirety (i.e. WHOLE) of their authentic endearments.
Moreover, REMOVAL OF RESTRAINT provides primordial structure to their elaborate imaginings of assailable and/or possibly insurmountable discordances (i.e. successful/insufficient REMOVAL OF EXPERIENTIAL RESTRAINT).

End of the day – I believe, yeah – I do think … we’ve gone through good and tougher times … I think, honestly – they’re just part of … the bigger learning process … [of] learning to love better, as best as we can. (Dan) [emphasis on PART-WHOLE patterns]

I’m okay with us, like – fighting here and there and stuff … We legit argue only a little bit … [and] we barely clash, like – overall and stuff … I reckon arguing too much – kinda kills the love and all, ya know? (Fiona) [emphasis on IMBALANCED PART/WHOLE imaginings]

Mate, I’m sayin’ – if we’re havin’ shit down the line … [that] ain’t goin’ away … [and] we ain’t gettin’ pass – nothin’ we can do ‘bout it. (Ben) [emphasis on insufficient REMOVAL OF RESTRAINT]

Um, I feel, well – we’ve been good so far … We’ve been able to … move beyond … [and] overcome, um – most of our small problems … I feel – well, I’m hoping … nothing too challenging gets in the way. (Rachel) [emphasis on successful/insufficient REMOVAL OF RESTRAINT]

This section has covered just a few of the many image schemas that enliven interviewees’ meaningful grasps of the relationship between their ideal/unideal loving conditions. Of course, as readers may expect by now, cultural meaning-templates are also an irreducible factor.

### 12.3. Cultural Meaning-Templates of Unideal Moments of ‘Being in Love’

Throughout previous chapters, I explored how interviewees’ biographical/schematic senses of self-growth, friendship, attraction, altruism, and reciprocity do not emerge purely from their own imaginations. Instead, they are partly thriven via their socialised learnings of myriad cultural meaning-templates. Some of these include handed-down Greek conceptions of virtues and friendship, 12th century courtly love’s exaltations of physical eroticism, Comtean proposals of altruism and later inclusions of empathy, and ancient notions of reciprocity and justice – amongst other templates already discussed (and many left unmentioned). To this degree, I posit such sedimented (and often intermingling) stimuli have, to some extent or another, veered interviewees to value their ideal moments of ‘being in love’ as archetypal composites of all these subtle environmental influences. This loose assertion is evidenced by the following types of responses, condensed from multiple interviews:
Just to me, I think – she’s helped me grow … a lot, just as a man … Honestly, our friendship … [is] probably half of how we stay in love … Being intimate, physically – I think, yeah – it’s just a natural expression of our love … I mean, I love her … [so] of course I’d want the best for her, always … We’ve mutual respect, mutual love. (Dan)

I reckon, like – we influenced each other … [to be] kinda more mature, more responsible and stuff now … I still see him as a friend and all that … although, like, ya know – obviously he’s more than that … Our emotional attraction’s a big thing … He’s sexy – he knows he is … Like, I reckon I love supporting him, encouraging him … We’re legit equal on most things. (Fiona)

Ain’t no doubt she’s inspirin’ me every day … She’s one of my best mates, my best friend … Our sex’s proper good – ain’t expectin’ anythin’ less … I’m knowin’ all of her, mate – what she’s really like … We’re fair – ain’t one-sided. (Ben)

I feel he’s really taught me … [how] to be a bit more assertive, sometimes … Uh, well – we’re definitely friends and partners, rolled into one … He’s attractive – mentally, physically … I feel, um – everything works both ways. (Rachel) [condensed responses illustrating the merged influences of multiple meaning-templates vis-à-vis interviewees’ perceptions of ideal loving conditions]

However, I propose interviewees’ felt divergences from some or all of these culturally endorsed aspects of ‘being in love’ have, in effect, unconsciously steered them to envision disparities between their own ‘actual’ and supposedly ‘expected’ (i.e. milieu-touted) experiences. In this regard, the very same meaning-templates that tacitly ‘set the bar’ of interviewees’ optimal loving are, on the flipside, modestly responsible for fomenting their more unideal moments (i.e. via imagined failures to live up to conditioned standards). The subsequent descriptions lend partial plausibility to this claim:

_I wasn’t listening to her the right way … [and] I just – I honestly felt I wasn’t living up to expectations … I wasn’t as supportive as I ought to be … I think it affected us – dampened our love, just for a while. (Dan)_

_He’s gotta give me equal respect … [otherwise] I like, ya know – I’m not tolerating anything less. (Fiona)_

_Mate – [if] we ain’t havin’ sex at all – I’m thinkin’ somethin’s up … That ain’t proper … We ain’t livin’ in a fuckin’ monastery, mate. (Ben)_

_I, um – I feel me not bothering to show him any concern … [is] like me not showing any love … I really feel, um – I wouldn’t want to be like that. (Rachel) [emphasis on unideal loving states via conceived shortcomings in relation to standards subliminally promoted by various cultural meaning-templates]_

A fresh meaning-template I wish to explore pertains to the resonating voice of 19th century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Here, Tanner explains how, up until today, Nietzsche’s work still manifests in “a variety of interpretations … which far from diminishing as the decades pass, seems
to be multiplying” (2000, p. 4). These interpretations take on many assorted forms, be it “a letter to a friend, marginalia in a Nietzsche text, an academic philosophical monograph, or an essay for a popular magazine” (Ratner-Rosenhagen 2012, p. 24). His oeuvre has also been undertaken by many influential thinkers, including (but not limited to) Bataille, Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida (Girard 1984), Sartre (Rickman 1996, p. 142), and Jung (Bishop 1995; Dixon 1999; Huskinson 2004) – each furthering his seminal thoughts. In short, Loukola asserts Nietzsche has made an undeniably “lasting impact in the history of [Western] morality, and most certainly in everyday life” (2013, p. ix), enjoying a far-reaching influence that, supposedly, rivals that of even Jesus (2013, p. ix).

I will not detail Nietzsche’s entire contributions to modern Western mindsets. Still, a major aspect I want to focus on centers on his beliefs in the inseparable relationship between displeasure and pleasure – and, by extension, hardship and joy. In The Gay Science, he writes:

What if pleasure and displeasure were so tied together that whoever wanted to have as much as possible of one must also have as much as possible of the other — that whoever wanted to learn to “jubilate up to the heavens” would also have to be prepared for “depression unto death”? … To this day you have a choice: either as little displeasure as possible, painlessness in brief … or as much displeasure as possible as the price for the growth of an abundance of subtle pleasures and joys that have rarely been relished yet. If you decide for the former and desire to diminish and lower the level of human pain, you also have to diminish and lower the level of their capacity for joy. (Nietzsche 1974, p. 85)

Amidst this experiential duality, Nietzsche posits life to be inevitably filled with a good degree of displeasure, whereupon ‘to live is to suffer’ (see Kain 2009, p. 58; Olivier 2012). However, rather than succumb in weakness, he consistently proposed that such hardships serve a much greater purpose – namely, to propel ourselves to existentially rewarding heights beyond those we have known.

… ask yourselves whether a tree which is to grow proudly skywards can dispense with bad weather and storms. Whether misfortune and opposition, or every kind of hatred, jealousy, stubbornness, distrust, severity, greed, and violence do not belong to the favourable conditions without which a great growth even of virtue is hardly possible? (Nietzsche 1974, p. 91)

The discipline of suffering, of great suffering – do you not know that only this discipline has created all enhancements of man so far? That tension of the soul in unhappiness which cultivates its strength, its shudders face to face with great ruin, its inventiveness and courage in enduring, preserving, interpreting, and exploiting suffering, and whatever has been granted to it of

---

225 See Pippin (ed. 2012), Tanner (2000), and Woodward (ed. 2011) for more detailed expositions on Nietzsche’s lasting Western cultural impact.
profundity, secret, mask, spirit, cunning, greatness – was it not granted to it through suffering, through the discipline of great suffering? (Nietzsche 2000, p. 344)\textsuperscript{226}

Remarkably, this assumption of strength through adversity – surmised by Nietzsche himself as “what doesn’t kill me makes me stronger” (1997, p. 6) – continues to have a profound, albeit often implicit, bearing on present-day Western cultures. In particular, Brady notes the philosopher’s aphorism to be “well-worn and much beloved … get[ting] regular airing from Hollywood screenwriters, footballers on Twitter, and teenagers offering consoling advice to their recently-but-involuntarily-single friends” (2015, n.p.). Mainstream media outlets make similar claims, with one Huffington Post writer professing Nietzsche’s words to be “one of the most used phrases in music and even society … uttered and known by nearly every person in the civilized world” (Ferroni 2012, n.p.). Beyond popular culture, this Nietzschean proposition is even perpetuated amidst esoteric discussions on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (e.g. Joseph & Butler 2010), psychological well-being (e.g. Seery, Holman & Silver 2010), education (e.g. Jonas 2010), and illness (e.g. Sedgwick 2013) – to name but a few contexts.

In light of the above, I opine interviewees’ everyday exposures to Nietzsche’s cultural meaning-template have discreetly stirred them to treat their unideal instances of ‘being in love’ as onerous – yet, ultimately rewarding – experiences. Specifically, their habits of seeing most temporary thematic declines as needed displeasures for better relishing ‘true love’ are, in my opinion, extremely evocative of the philosopher’s axiom.

I think, end of the day, it just boils down to … not giving up so easily … Loving someone – it’s just the best feeling in the world … Honestly, I think also, yeah – love – any relationship – it’s just hard and stressful at times … [but] I think that’s why it’s worth fighting for … The best things in life … don’t come easy. (Dan)

I reckon we’ve kinda been through a lot with one another … He’s rubbed me the wrong way … [and] like, I’m sure I annoy him too … [but] everything’s, ya know – going through so much – it’s legit made us solid and stuff, as a couple. (Fiona)

Mate, I’m thinkin’ – you gotta put up with fuckin’ shit … [to] be appreciatin’ the good shit more … She and me – we ain’t any different, mate. (Ben)

\textsuperscript{226} Framing Nietzsche’s ruminations, de Botton suggests that:

Nietzsche was striving to correct the [common] belief that fulfillment must come easily or not at all, a belief ruinous in its effects, for it leads us to withdraw prematurely from challenges that might have been overcome if only we had been prepared for the savagery legitimately demanded by almost everything valuable. (2001, p. 215)
I feel, um – we’ve had worse days … [so] I feel we’re really … in a better state of mind … [and] strong enough to overcome challenges. (Rachel) [emphasis on Nietzschean-shaped subscriptions to strength through adversity]

Although non-exhaustive, what is provided here adequately shows how cultural meaning-templates interlace with interviewees’ individualities and grasping of image schemas, holistically moulding their ideal / unideal conditions of ‘being in love’.

12.4. Conclusion

Much of this thesis has explored the key ingredients that make up interviewees’ optimally loving experiences. By contrast, this chapter introduces their more unideal relations with beloveds. Whilst unfolding, this experiential dimension comprises numerous qualities, including their senses of: 1) receding expressions in one or more super-ordinate themes (in general and / or their constituting nuances) that, in effect, alienate them from more ideal states, 2) one-off / fleeting thematic declines which, for the most part, do not seriously detract from their overall feelings of quintessential loving, 3) more incessant regressions that start to engender longer-lasting negative reactions such as anger, sadness, etc., 4) discordances that arise from their comparisons between ideal and unideal states of ‘being in love’, making them feel inhibited from what their relationships ‘ought to be like’, 5) perturbances of other life-contexts due to discordances, 6) varying discordant intensities, based on Heideggerian existential-spatial nearness (i.e. mentalforegrounding) and perceived severities of thematic declines (i.e. extent of deviation from ‘normal’ relational levels of super-ordinate expressions), 7) thematic declines being caused by partners, themselves, or both parties, 8) diverse negative reactions that depend on which themes are thought to be lacking, who interviewees regard as mostly to blame, and how intense discordances are, 9) varied re-evaluations of their ideal loving states, stemming from the aforesaid reactions, 10) mutual inclusions of ideal / unideal states as aspects of ‘truly’ loving their partners. This branches from their general beliefs in the need to endure negative moments to better understand the ‘actual’ full meaning of authentic love, 11) clarifying that these valuations are conditional to an overall prevalence of ideal states over unideal ones, and that any discordances are felt to be assailable, not irreconcilable. These diverse qualities are all invigorated via a non-reducible interweaving of biographical, schematic, and cultural influences.
PART C

13. Conclusion
13. Conclusion

“Do we now have a ‘definition’ of love? We are not even close.”
(Solomon 1994, p. 47)

‘Being in love’ is an experiential cornerstone of Dan, Ben, Fiona, and Rachel’s romantic partnerships. Amidst our many conversations, these young Australians took the chance to speak at length on what it is that makes their intimate relations with beloveds so distinct – to which I was a privileged listener. For them, ‘truly’ loving their partners is much more than a luxurious afterthought; it is a cherished experience that is as bold as it is subtle, guiding their public affinities whilst also steering their most private, deeply fulfilling, and at times frustrating connections with another person.

For this concluding chapter, I will first provide a recap of all my key findings. Subsequently, I explore how my study has started to fill in the knowledge gap engendered by the three literature trends outlined in Chapter 2. Current research limitations and possible future developments are also discussed.

13.1. Summary of Key Findings

Utilising Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), my main research goal was to empathetically discover and contextually describe the shared qualities (super-ordinate themes) that interviewees regard as defining aspects of ‘being in love’ with their partners. These qualities were interpreted to be self-growth, friendship, attraction, altruism, and reciprocity that, together, lead to their most ideal loving moments. However, unideal states – that usually emerge amidst one or more types of thematic declines – are just as key to forming their senses of ‘true love’. As per Johnson’s philosophy, all these embodied experiences were analysed as outcomes of indivisibly biographical, schematic, and cultural processes of meaning-making. I will now give a summary of some of my major findings.
Self-growth hinges on interviewees’ feelings of ‘growing as people’ in the wake of partners’ presences. Foremost, this super-ordinate theme stems from their broader beliefs that the immaterial essence of who they are is demarcated ‘within’ their physical bodies. ‘Growth’ thus entails interviewees’ imaginings of developing their internal virtues thanks to their inspired receptions and / or observations of partners’ outwardly-directed consciousness (i.e. linked to intersubjectivity). These developments may involve their impressions of enhancing their general identities (e.g. becoming a ‘good’ person overall) and / or improvements in specific qualities (e.g. ‘kindness’, ‘honesty’, etc.). Such benefits are especially pronounced given interviewees’ habits in idealising their partners as being more virtuous compared to most other persons. Schematically, SCALE, PATH, and CONTAINER are some of the plentiful embodied structures enlivening these biographical conceptions. The Western cultural meaning-templates of virtue ethics, Aristotelian eudaimonia, and existential self-containment also play formative roles.

Interviewees’ friendships with beloveds thrive on two mutually reinforcing aspects – namely, commonality and grouping. Commonality connotes their experiences of finding / nurturing / sustaining shared interests, values, beliefs, activities, etc. with partners. This amounts to enjoying similar ways of thinking, established via joint affinities and / or sincere intentions to better understand each other’s varying dispositions. At times, interviewees suggest these similarities happen in a ‘natural’ fashion, although active interpersonal efforts to maintain them are most often required. Meanwhile, grouping stems from their thoughts of figuratively bonding with beloveds. This is experientially akin to the formation of ‘we-unions’ (Spiegelberg 1973, p. 142) that signify mutual relational shifts from ‘you’ and ‘I’ into a solidaric ‘we’. Such shifts entail interviewees’ creative processes of differentiation that non-literally place partners and themselves into inclusive two-person friendships vis-à-vis excluded others. To them, these bonds do not undermine anyone’s unique individuality. Instead, they merely indicate symbiotic relations with various ‘things of the world’ via an additional dyadic orientation. Groupings are also seen by interviewees as an intermingling communion of beloveds’ and their own distinct life-histories, memories, personalities, etc. These connections are largely felt to be stronger, deeper, and more lasting than most others. Moreover, self-authenticity is an especially key facet of friendship, based off their wishes for both individuals to increasingly convey their ‘real selves’ to one another (i.e. minimised discrepancies between internal intent / externally communicated expressions). Commonality and grouping equally contribute to interviewees’ overall perceptions of becoming existentially closer,
hallmarked by thoughts of ‘truly’ understanding, and being understood by, befriended partners. MATCHING, LINK, CONTAINER, PART-WHOLE, BALANCE, and NEAR-FAR are a few image schemas capacitating these experiences. Implicit exposures to the meaning-templates of ancient Greek friendship (including its later merger with romantic love) and 18th century self-authenticity appear just as pertinent.

Interviewees are attracted to their partners in both physical and emotional ways. Physical attraction relates to their notions of being ‘pulled in’ by beloveds’ bodily appearances. This movement happens in partly literal ways (e.g. adjusting their bodies closer) – but mostly centers on their tendencies to shift cognitive focus onto partners’ corporeal aesthetics. From here, interviewees appreciate beloveds’ physical attractiveness in both holistic and specific ways. The first evaluative route implies paying attention to partners’ overall / general looks, demeanours, etc.; the second entails allurements towards nuanced bodily parts, features, and so on. In addition, physical attraction is a highly multisensorial experience composed of sight, touch, smell, sound, and taste. It is moreover discerned via interviewees’ subjective (i.e. individualised) and subjectively objective opinions (i.e. taken-for-granted comparisons to societal standards). Eroticism is also key, involving their imaginative transformations of beloveds’ corporeal qualities into cognitive symbols of past / future sexual desires, pleasures, etc. This adds to sexual tension, premised on their mental / physical senses of reciprocally building towards bodily releases with partners. This release may involve actual biological orgasms and / or simply the partaking of ‘romantic’ gestures (e.g. kissing, hugging, etc.). For interviewees, such activities are guided by sexual subjectification (contra to objectification), wherein eroticism is not the sole goal per se, but rather, treated as a means of better appreciating partners’ existential ‘wholes’. Physical attraction is furthermore shaped by their future-in-present desires to sustain long-term intimacies amidst ‘being in love’, accompanied by growing multisensorial familiarities.

Emotional attraction is extremely important to affirming interviewees’ feelings of ideal loving. Like physical allurement, this thematic experience involves their perceptions of being ‘drawn’ towards partners. However, in this case, it is the immaterial substances of beloveds’ ‘minds’ (including varying allusions to ‘personalities’, ‘spirits’, ‘souls’, etc.) that are especially attractive to them. Spurred by intentions to ‘look beyond’ outward appearances, this form of figurative magnetism again occurs via holistic and specific evaluations – respectively attuned to their overall
and nuanced adulations of beloveds’ unique identities. Emotional attraction is also multisensorial – not in an immediate perceptual sense, but to the degree interviewees are wont to creatively extend their root sensorial experiences to grasp partners’ non-physical appeals. Another major facet is relational exclusivity which, flourished via friendship, implies interviewees’ desires to ‘truly’ understand beloveds to a larger and more authentic extent than most other persons. In addition, they believe enduring emotional attraction requires mutual cultivations of interpersonal similarities (as linked to friendship). Chemistry is yet another core dimension, roused by their impressions of beneficially impacting, and being impacted by, partners’ distinct individualities. Interviewees are moreover inclined to mentally foreground beloveds’ identities ‘in their minds’ – a defining aspect of emotional attraction akin to Heideggerian existential-spatial nearness. Amidst especially ‘deep’ conversations, occasional temporal shifts (i.e. altered perceptions of time) may also arise in relation to what each of them feels to be a ‘normal’ pace of everyday life. Interviewees also tend to partake in conceptual / representational evaluative patterns – to which the more beloveds are thought to represent their model conceptions of various human concepts (e.g. ideals, beliefs, etc.), the greater their emotional attractions become. Rounding off this thematic summary, it is important to reiterate that physical / emotional attraction unfurl in both distinct and indistinct ways. The former refers to interviewees’ maintained cognitive habits of categorising partners’ allures according to bodily and immaterial dimensions; the latter reflects their simultaneous (seemingly contradictive, but experientially complimentary) attempts to avoid reducing beloveds’ totalising pulls to exact physical / emotional reasons. On a primordial level, ATTRACTION, CONTAINER, PART-WHOLE, COLLECTION, COMPULSION, ENABLEMENT, MATCHING, SCALE, and NEAR-FAR are just some of the myriad image schemas subtending their super-ordinate attractions. Concurrently, the cultural meaning-templates of 12th century courtly love, the five senses, emotions qua concept, and vernacular extensions of chemistry also seem to assert an implicit experiential influence.

Ideal moments of ‘being in love’ rest on altruism. This super-ordinate theme is steeped in interviewees’ earnest wishes for partners’ lives to perpetually become better – that is, for them to always be as ‘good as they can be’ across various contexts. What counts as ‘good’ is pivoted towards beloveds’ – and not simply their own – subjective definitions. Their altruistic hopes are both existentially broad (e.g. wanting partners to feel like generally ‘good persons’, etc.) and contextually specific (e.g. desires for beloveds to be ‘good at’ freely-chosen activities, practices, etc.). Of course, whilst partners’ personal valuations remain a priority, interviewees do express
some degree of self-concern. For instance, they are likely to be more forthcoming in their altruistic support if they detect greater similarities between both persons’ meanings of goodness. Further to this, interviewees believe partners’ lives may be bettered through external and self-related factors. External factors are thought to happen beyond their immediate existential influences (e.g. partners achieving benefits that they had nothing to do with, etc.), whilst self-related ones center on their abilities to directly assist beloveds with positive outcomes (e.g. helping them reach certain ‘good’ aims, milestones, etc.). However, there are times where the second form of care may be greeted with initial resistance, mostly due to relational disagreements on ‘what is best’ for partners. Such instances are nonetheless still deemed altruistic by interviewees on the strict conditions that any given support is genuinely well-meaning (e.g. not for selfish or malicious reasons, etc.), and that partners eventually come to willing – not coerced – agreement with their views. Altruism is also imagined as a motivating force capable of uplifting and / or maintaining beloveds’ well-beings. Expressed in both physical (i.e. actioned) and emotional (i.e. cognitive) ways, these encouragements are often framed to varying situations – which interviewees hope will be resolved in ways that add to beloveds’ betterments amidst prospects of similarly beneficial instances to come. In addition, they emphasise that ‘true’ altruism requires their externally expressed supports to match their internal intents. To a modest degree, they seek for partners to recognise this sincerity – albeit less so for personal gain, and more to do with reassuring beloveds of their unwavering care and concern. Other defining qualities of altruism include interviewees propensities to see such experiences as at once partner-directed and relationship defining, actively given (rather than passively withheld), empathetic (i.e. imagining ‘themselves as partners’), and value-in-itself (i.e. intrinsically beneficial) / value-added (i.e. each act contributing to wider enhancements to partners’ self-experiences). These various experiential threads are propositionally imbued via CONTAINER, SCALE, MATCHING, CENTRE-PERIPHERY, REMOVAL OF RESTRAINT, VERTICALITY / UP-DOWN, and PART-WHOLE – to name but a few image schemas. Environmental influences – including handed-down Greek notions of goodwill, Comtean altruism, and subsequent subsumptions of empathy – are equally crucial.

Reciprocity is based on interviewees’ two-way exchanges with partners. These exchanges at times involve physical gift-giving. However, for the most part, they comprise the mutual communication of deeds / gestures that are felt by them to represent assorted aspects of the aforesaid super-ordinate themes. A good amount of evaluative flexibility is practiced, wherein traded thematic expressions
are largely taken as qualitatively interchangeable (e.g. a given act of friendship can be loosely returned with altruism, received self-growth may inspire expressed emotional attraction, etc.). For interviewees, both words and actions count towards mutuality – although in certain circumstances, ‘actions speak louder than words’ in determining ‘true’ reciprocity. Thematic expressions should also be voluntarily given by beloveds and themselves, not out of pressured obligations to do so. Still, fairness is a key aspect, fuelled by their desires to upkepp relatively balanced relationships with partners. This balance is mostly discerned via their readings of ‘how much’ – and not ‘how many times’ – deeds / gestures reflect shared qualities of ‘being in love’. It is also characterised by interviewees’ ‘middling’ wishes to at once avoid unfairness (i.e. due to fears of one-way givingness) and excessive fairness (i.e. over-calculative quid pro quo exchanges). This moderate bilateral equality is evaluated in temporally traversing ways, usually determined over multiple, rather than singular, interactions with beloveds. In addition, whilst reciprocity entails expressive exchanges of other super-ordinate themes, it is also elevated as a desired style of relationality in its own right. Interviewees moreover make it clear that any form of negative reciprocity – that is, mutual inflections of hurt, insult, etc – are strongly counterintuitive to ‘being in love’. By contrast, they convey gratitude at being ‘chosen’ recipients of more positive thematic expressions. In terms of image schemas, BALANCE, ENABLEMENT, CONTAINER, BLOCKAGE, PART-WHOLE, and COUNTERFORCE are central to metaphorically shaping the above experiential qualities. Long-standing Western notions of reciprocity and justice also appear to be persuasive factors.

Coalesced, interviewees’ experiences of self-growth, friendship, attraction, altruism, and reciprocity each contribute to their optimal states of ‘being in love’. However, as mentioned earlier, any sustained declines in one or more of these thematic qualities may lead to instances of unideal loving (excludes most intermittent or short-lived arguments, disagreements, etc.). These instances often create discordance – that is, their imaginings of experiential disparities between peak / impoverished states of ‘being in love’, which may in turn perturb other life-areas. Discordances differ in their intensities, discerned via how often interviewees mull over them (i.e. Heideggerian existential-spatial nearness) and their perceived severities (i.e. extent in which thematic expressions have deviated from relational ‘norms’). Interviewees may blame such weakened affectional states on partners, themselves, or both parties. The kinds of negative reactions that ensue (e.g. selfishness, anger, hurt, etc.) depend on which thematic expressions are receding, who is felt to be primarily at fault, and varying discordant intensities – amongst other factors. These
reactions may subsequently spur them to re-evaluate their definitions of ideal loving in numerous ways, including questioning the validity of past optimal experiences, appropriating their definitions / actions, and so on. Most importantly, interviewees believe that both ideal and unideal moments of ‘being in love’ are crucial to shaping their feelings of ‘truly’ loving their beloveds. This is partly predicated on the notion that they must endure difficult times with partners so as to fully embrace what it ‘really’ means to experience this phenomenon. However, such embracement is subject to two main conditions, namely, that quintessential states continue to prevail over thematically waning moments on the whole, and that any challenging instances are not deemed to be completely insurmountable. Affirmative actions (e.g. breaking up, taking time off from the relationship, etc.) may be contemplated by each person should thematic declines persist beyond his / her tolerance threshold. Once again, image schemas – in this case, CONTAINER, ITERATION, MATCHING, CENTRE-PERIPHERY, SCALE, BLOCKAGE, PART-WHOLE, BALANCE, and REMOVAL OF RESTRAINT – are responsible for meaningfully enabling and constraining all these mentioned qualities. Accumulative expectations set by all the aforementioned cultural meaning-templates also implicitly guide interviewees’ envisages of wanting loving conditions – with an additional Nietzschean influence.

13.2. Literature Trends Redressed: Contributions of this Study

Three theoretical / methodological trends were covered in the literature review that, in my opinion, have created a lacuna in our current social scientific understanding of love. The first trend I explored centred on the predominance of love-related studies that, either directly or discreetly, have adopted social constructionist standpoints. The built-in assumption of many of these works is that proliferated words, languages, ideologies, symbols, etc. are powerful abstract forces capable of epistemically moulding a person’s ‘mental’ conceptions of love. In fairness, such types of studies (e.g. Beall & Sternberg 1995, Dion, KK & Dion, KL 1996, Gottschall & Nordlund 2008, etc.) have usefully brought attention to the culturally relative and polysemous nature of the phenomenon. They also raise opportunities to question some of its marginalising dimensions. However, at the same time, this unbridled ‘ideational bias’ (Lyon 1995, p. 248) has made it all but “impossible to deal directly with the human embodiment of emotion” (Lyon 1995, p. 249). As I made clear, this observation does not deny the persuasive influence that cultural discourses play
in shaping love’s paradigmatic status. Instead, it merely suggests that simultaneous bodily processes of meaning-making have generally been overlooked, wherein our materialities are largely treated as passive canvases for cultures to ‘inscribe upon’. This seldom-acknowledged reductionism has led many constructionist-inspired scholars on love to ignore how people’s active corporealities actually structure and contribute to everyday understandings of such experiences.

My study responded to this analytical oversight on a few fronts. For starters, within the IPA framework, interviewees were given free rein to describe their moments of ‘being in love’ in sensorimotor terms. This helped to generate many novel body-centric insights rarely covered in the current literature. For example, they often conveyed their multisensorial attractions towards partners’ touches, smells, etc., whilst also professing the importance of physically expressive actions in defining ‘real’ reciprocity. Findings like these and more illustrated crucial corporeal dimensions of ‘being in love’ that many constructionist accounts have hitherto largely missed or sidestepped. Further to this, Johnson’s philosophy inspired my own research goals to “look more deeply into aspects of experience that lie beneath words and sentences” (2007, p. 17). This included exploring how image schemas – that is, recurring basic patterns inherent to embodied existence (Johnson 1987, p. xvi) – serve as bodily structures of meaning that, in the first place, shape how interviewees make imaginative (and often metaphorical) sense of their loving partnerships. At the same time, cultural meaning-templates related to their biographical experiences of ‘being in love’ were also considered, thus giving concurrent attention to more ideational aspects of meaning-making. In such respects, I believe my dual focus on “both the material and the ideal” (Burkitt, p. 2002, p. 153) has set an early directive for a more multifaceted examination of this phenomenon that accounts for how the body “acts back upon or interacts with socially obtained discourses” (Cromby & Nightingale 1999, p. 11).

The second trend pertained to intellectualist bias. To recap, this is a term first used by Bourdieu (1992, p. 68-70) to refer to scholars’ habits of injecting their personal views into their topic of study amidst the privileged cultural standing of academia. With respects to love, I demonstrated with a few examples (e.g. Illouz 2012, Jankowiak & Fischer 1992, etc.) how this specific form of bias quietly pervades a sizeable portion of the literature. This pervasion happens via some researchers’ tendencies to presuppose and promote their own closed definitions of what romantic love ‘really is’ or ‘ought to be’. Other related cases see social scientists ‘cherry pick’ highly
selective facets of love as a preemptive strategy to prove the moral legitimacy of their prior – and often pessimistic – scholastic arguments. In the literature review, I stressed that studies like these have undoubtedly helped to promote both esoteric and mainstream interest in the phenomenon. Still, their largely hidden intellectualist biases have, for the most part, only worked to cordon off the fuller experiential spectrum of love, even before any enquiries are commenced.

This thesis is of course not immune from a fair amount of intellectualist bias. Indeed, as I have already stated, my research goals and design are heavily indebted to my personal habitus (Bourdieu 1977). Further to this, IPA is in itself a method entrenched in ‘double hermeneutics’ (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 3), to which I try to make meaningful sense of interviewees’ sense-making responses. This attempt inescapably relies on how I preferentially choose to approach data collection, analysis, and other interpretative processes. Moreover, in adopting Johnson’s philosophy, I am clearly promoting embodiment over Cartesian dualism – which in effect shows a certain ontological / epistemological favourtism. To this degree, my social scientific labour is testament to the wider fact that “all research is biased, because all researchers have a predisposition to certain paradigms … or perspectives” (Baker & Gentry 2006, p. 322; see also Smith & Osborn 2007, p. 53).

Nonetheless, a key difference between my research and other intellectually biased works lies with how experiential definitions of love are developed in the wake of incoming information. Specifically, many of the past studies I mentioned proceed from scholars’ already-discerned personal conceptions of the phenomenon, which are then used to make various empirical / theoretical deductions. By contrast, I begin with a flexible “spirit of openness” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 27) as a means of inductively exploring the multifarious natures of interviewees’ loving engagements – for their own sake. Admittedly, some degree of academic privilege was exercised during moments where I detected “something going on here that maybe the participants themselves are less aware of” (Smith & Osborn 2007, p. 53).227 Regardless, most inferences gleamed were consistently verified and / or corrected via ongoing cross-validity checks with interviewees. The sum result of this extensively dialogical process is a far more inclusive, multi-voiced, and empathetic understanding of love that emerged through active listening – rather than

227 This is especially so when it came to conducting image schematic / cultural meaning-template investigations.
It is thus my hope that the reactional findings generated will serve as a useful counterpoise to prior ‘ivory-towered’ expositions on the topic.

An overlapping third trend involved the abundance of macrosociological theories on love. Providing numerous examples (e.g. Bauman 2003, Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995, Giddens 1992, etc.), I proposed these social scientific works have helped to identify broad historical, cultural, political, and / or economic forces that influence Western persons’ everyday impressions of the phenomenon. These studies also offer insightful critiques on existing structural inequalities in romantic intimacies that invite for further public discussions. However, as I pointed out, nomothetic approaches of this sort are prone to positing causal claims that, in their effort to be all-encompassing, merely gloss over the idiographic intricacies that colour the ‘love lives’ of actual individuals. This reduction is partly owed to most macrosociological scholars’ disinterests in collecting first-hand qualitative data – opting instead to base their totalising observations solely on a surfeit of secondary texts.

Readers can observe that I, too, have loosely explored the environmental roles that handed-down cultural meaning-templates play in shaping interviewees’ experiences of ‘being in love’. However, my main point of divergence from the above trend sits with how these broader assessments were processually conducted. Specifically, many macrosociological studies adopt a distinctly ‘top-down’ hierarchical analysis on love. Emphasis is thus first placed on overarching concepts (e.g. modernity, industrialisation, feminism, etc.) that are assumed to impose near-ubiquitous effects on large populations. By contrast, my research adopts a much more cautious ‘bottom-up’ strategy that, more than anything else, begins with and remains attuned to micro-analysing interviewees’ unique loving experiences. Only from doing this were macro deliberations later sketched out in response to given descriptions – albeit in a less punctilious manner than the aforesaid works, but at least not from pure ‘armchair theorisations’ alone. As such, whilst still in its initial stages of planned development (see Section 13.3 below), I opine this research offers a few keen contributions not often articulated in the current literature. For starters, by reversing the analytical sequence, any broader observations posited remain ultimately enrooted in the personal

228 An arguable exception to this might be my decision to preemptively home in on ‘being in love’, and not romantic love in general. However, interviewees still enjoyed ample opportunities to freely express what they feel to be the full experiential spectrum of this phenomenon. This open-ended style of enquiry is seldom seen in the types of intellectualist works I have cited.
This approach partially responds to Felmlee & Sprecher’s (2007, p. 404) suggestion on the need to investigate love in a manner that stays oriented to the actual lives of people, without losing sight of the collective movements that potentially inspire them (see also Lindholm 1998, p. 247-248; Solomon 1994, p. 27). In addition, inspired by both IPA and Johnson, I consistently sought to provide experiential nuance, even as I recognised the partial meaning-making impact of cultural meaning-templates. This reflects my focus on unravelling the many intricacies, complexities, and varieties that make up the social phenomenon – details mostly loss amidst broadstroke macrosociological reductions. To this end, it is my aspiration that this macro-from-micro strategy will motivate other scholars to strike a better balance between phenomenological descriptions and conceptual prescriptions – if only to keep sight of love’s varying particularities amidst concurrent strivings for generality.

In sum, the overall usefulness of my research stems from its efforts to redress the three trends I have just discussed. By seeing interviewees’ embodiments as an epicentre of meaning-making, new ‘fleshy’ dimensions are given to their experiences of ‘being in love’. These pivotal bodily aspects of the phenomenon are too often evaded by purely constructionist approaches. This thesis also recognises the inexorable presence of intellectualist bias. Yet, unlike many previous efforts, such academic privilege was partly subdued through an open embracing of other persons’ perspectives that are of utmost concern. Doing so has partly veered my findings towards creating a more rounded “picture of romance that has the ring of truth to it” (Lindholm 1998, p. 278) – an epistemic ‘reality’ less entrenched in isolated esotericism. Lastly, my incorporation of IPA’s ‘bottom-up’ analysis illuminates a horizon of qualities, paradoxes, and other intricate experiential features of love that most macrosociologists are inclined to ignore. Overall, I hope these alternative theoretical / methodological strategies will provide some inspiration to social scientists’ respective pursuits to understand this intriguing form of human relation.

13.3. Limitations of this Study: Future Research Directions

This study has produced many distinct observations on ‘being in love’. However, I will now elaborate on a few notable research limitations, using the entailing discussions as a springboard for considering future research possibilities.
I have devoted much of this thesis to identifying the five salient shared qualities that define interviewees’ ideal – and via impoverishment, unideal – loving experiences. That said, as disclosed at the start of Part B, a portion of my findings are not fully expanded on, mostly due to space constraints. For instance, in Chapter 8, I briefly stated in a footnote that self-authenticity with beloveds begets strong feelings of trust, compassion, joy, and so on – which I do not unpack further. On one hand, this resonates with Psathas (1973, p. 11) remarks on the impossibility of full explication, in which trying to delineate every stated experiential realm would ensue unceasing hermeneutic interpretations. Yet, at the same time, it must be said that such phenomenological curtailing does lead to a slight loss of nuance in discussing interviewees’ highly interwoven experiences. This is coupled with the fact that many supplementary observations have been inevitably excluded from this report. For instance, I initially noticed that, in tandem with the five super-ordinate themes, interviewees also derive meaning from their loving relations via feelings of ‘ordinary extraordinariness’. In particular, I had originally intended to detail their dual desires to be ‘ordinary’ persons partaking in commonplace acts of loving – whilst also seeking to be ‘extraordinary’ in beloveds’ eyes. However, this along with a few other analytical considerations were left out, again because of necessary restrictions.

In light of the above, I propose the findings presented in this report should be taken as illuminative – but nonetheless provisional – entries into interviewees’ vivid worlds of ‘being in love’. Ultimately, more descriptive expansion is needed not just on the common qualities already outlined here, but also for the wider gamut of experiences that did not make the ‘final cut’. To this degree, it is my intention to eventually put forth further publications garnered from this research, so as to better unravel the abounding subtleties that shape interviewees’ enriching – and at times, strenuous – ‘love lives’.

Several other limitations must also be addressed. As noted in Chapter 4, Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009, p. 56) exalt semi-structured interviews as an optimal method of data collection for IPA studies. This is the most popular interviewing strategy within the field (Brocki & Wearden 2006, p. 90) since it is “easily managed; allow[s] rapport to be developed; allow[s] participants to think, speak, and be heard; and [is] well suited to in-depth and personal discussion” (Reid, Flowers & Larkin 2005, p. 22). These flexible qualities were indeed helpful in facilitating my many relaxed
conversations with interviewees, allowing me to gain rich experiential insights unmarred by over-formality.

However, as I also discussed, semi-structured interviews have their own caveats. One of them is impression management (Goffman 1959) in which “individuals attempt to control the impressions others form of them” (Leary & Kowalski 1990, p. 34). Elaborating further, this management style might stem from, amongst other things, interviewees’ efforts (consciously or otherwise) to “shade responses to present a positive picture of themselves … [and] express an identity appropriate to the situation of the interview as much as something more stable” (Weiss 1995, p. 149). Such ‘politically correct’ obfuscations are not necessarily done so with ill-intentions to deceive, but may be motivated by their more earnest wishes to be liked as socially desirable persons (Rapley 2001, p. 316).

Whatever the underlying reason, the potential presence of impression management renders it difficult for me to fully discern if interviewees’ responses ‘truly’ reflect their ‘genuine’ views. This feeds into an unassailable methodological limitation of most IPA studies. By default, researchers are largely invited to take “what the participants are actually saying” (Pringle et al. 2011, p. 21) as privileged information that reveal the nature of the phenomenon being studied. Yet, given that any interpretations gleamed are at best “second-order constructs” (Blaikie 2007, p. 92), it remains impossible for me to unequivocally gauge which of interviewees’ responses are ‘truer’ than others.229 In this regard, just as I invited them to trust and befriend me, so too did I have to invest faith in their willingness to divulge their ‘real’ feelings of ‘being in love’. It is therefore prudent for readers to regard my findings not as unquestionable ‘truths’ per se, but rather, as informed hermeneutic interpretations that may or may not be partly affected by what interviewees felt ‘ought to be said’ over what they ‘actually’ experience.

That being said, a currently untapped route of analytical enquiry could involve treating interviewees’ impression managements (where detected) as in themselves formative aspects of their loving experiences. For instance, interviewees regularly praised beloveds for their physical attractiveness. However, there were also a few moments where they seemed to be ‘playing up’ their aesthetic adulations. In my opinion, such expressive instances may indicate ‘social

229 This is exacerbated by an inescapable existential ‘distancing’ that makes it impossible for me to know what interviewees’ experiences are ‘really’ like – since, put simply, I am not them (see Dingwall 1997, p. 56).
desirability bias’ – defined as “the tendency of people to deny socially undesirable traits or qualities and to admit to socially desirable ones” (Phillips & Clancy 1972, p. 923). In this case, interviewees might be trying to upkeep socially desirable impressions of being unwaveringly allured by partners’ looks – since they may see this as an ‘expectation’ of romantic intimacy. To this degree, rather than inhibiting ‘real’ experiential access, these and other acts of impression management could alternatively be taken as defining facets of ‘being in love’ in and of themselves. This form of interpretative work is not included in this report, and as such, offers an exciting possibility for future research expansions.

Multiple in-depth conversations were carried out with Dan, Ben, Fiona, and Rachel over a span of three years. My attention was heavily focused on identifying relatively ‘stable’ or enduring qualities of their loving experiences across the entire interview schedule. However, it must be duly noted that I did not extensively develop a more detailed ‘narrative analysis’ that “trac[es] changes … in their narrative[s] over time” (Thomson & Holland 2003, p. 237). Akin to longitudinal ‘panel studies’ (Lewis 2003, p. 54) or ‘trajectory analysis’ (Grossoehme & Lipstein 2016), this would have entailed keeping closer tabs on unfolding life-events that may have affected how they live out nuanced aspects of their romantic partnerships. For instance, interviewees often expressed their consistent impressions of ‘commonality’ and ‘grouping’ amidst being friends with beloveds. These experiences seem to make up the persistent features of this super-ordinate theme. However, at the same time, each interviewee’s befriendment also appeared to slightly evolve over time, especially in response to altering relational situations, expectations, and events – particularly those that inspire his / her imaginative ‘then-and-now’ comparisons. To this degree, interlacing impacts between interviewees’ perceptions of time and their lived realities of ‘being in love’ have not been fully conveyed in this report.²³⁰ This path of temporal inquiry would have been useful in illuminating, for instance, which qualities of ‘being in love’ are more open to changes than others – and, simultaneously, which are more ‘evergreen’. On top of this, I have not made a sustained effort to document my growing one-on-one relationships with interviewees throughout the research process (see Thomson & Holland 2003, p. 236). Doing this would have allowed me to better detail how varying levels of interpersonal familiarity may impact the kinds of responses I did attempt to trace interviewees’ time-relative comparisons between their ideal and unideal loving moments. However, the same degree of temporal focus has not yet been accorded to other qualities that define ‘being in love’.

²³⁰
given. Plans are already underway to implement both these analytical enhancements for upcoming elaborations of this project.

For the most part, IPA studies – including this one – centre on idiographic accounts of a small number of interviewees, whereupon “conclusions drawn are thus specific to that particular group” (Brocki & Wearden 2006, p. 95). As such, it would be rash for me at this point in time to assert that any of my findings – including wider considerations of cultural meaning-templates – equally apply to other persons outside of my selected interviewees. That being said, I believe “subsequent studies may add to this [group], so that very gradually more general claims can be made, with each founded on the detailed examination of a set of case studies” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 51). Aligned to this goal, I intend to conduct further work with other scholars to recruit persons of diverse socio-demographic variables (e.g. older individuals, non-Australians, differing sexual orientations, races, ethnicities, etc.). This will open up avenues for cross-study comparisons that seek to detect shared qualities of ‘being in love’ (if any) that pertain to an ever-enlarging population. 231 In short, IPA offers rich prospects for broadening our social scientific understanding of the phenomenon in ways that stay grounded in a “detailed analysis of individuals’ accounts of their psychosocial world” (Smith 1999, p. 413; see Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 29).

13.4. Final Words

Academic interest in romantic love continues to flourish at a welcoming pace. Amidst this scholastic growth, my own research has striven to reveal some of the many phenomenological complexities that enliven interviewees’ feelings of ‘being in love’. These experiences are to them a prodigious existential force that imbues the profundities, pleasures, and pains of their embodied relations with beloveds. There is of course much more to be said about this unique realm of human intimacy – a task that will guide my curiosity in the years to come.

---

231 Schematic and cultural meaning-template contemplations may also be suitably modified and / or refined in the wake of incoming responses.
Bibliography


Csordas, TJ 1990, ‘Embodiment as a paradigm for anthropology’, *Ethos*, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 5-47.


Dunleavy, P 2003, Authoring a PhD: how to plan, draft, write, and finish a doctoral thesis or dissertation, Palgrave Macmillan, New York.


Gilman, SL 1991, Inscribing the other, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln.


Kemper, TD 1987, ‘How many emotions are there? Wedding the social and the autonomic components’, *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 93, no. 2, pp. 263-289.


Rickman, HP 1996, Philosophy in literature, Associated University Presses, Cranbury.


Schmid, H 2001, ‘‘Presupposition can be a bluff”: how abstract nouns can be used as presupposition triggers’, *Journal of Pragmatics*, vol. 33, no. 10, pp. 1529-1552.


Singer, P 2015, *The most good you can do: how effective altruism is changing ideas about living ethically*, Yale University Press, New Haven.


Umberson, D, Thomeer, MK & Lodge, AC 2015, ‘Intimacy and emotion work in lesbian, gay, and heterosexual relationships’, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 77, no. 2, pp. 542-556.


Minerva Access is the Institutional Repository of The University of Melbourne

Author/s:
Wee Ler Ping, Levan

Title:
'Being in love': an interpretative phenomenological analysis of young Australians' romantic experiences

Date:
2017

Persistent Link:
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/207964

File Description:
'Being in love': an interpretative phenomenological analysis of young Australians' romantic experiences

Terms and Conditions:
Terms and Conditions: Copyright in works deposited in Minerva Access is retained by the copyright owner. The work may not be altered without permission from the copyright owner. Readers may only download, print and save electronic copies of whole works for their own personal non-commercial use. Any use that exceeds these limits requires permission from the copyright owner. Attribution is essential when quoting or paraphrasing from these works.