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We're one, but we're not the same:

Individualization and increasing marriage rates unraveled

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Master's thesis, SOCM04
30 ESTC-credits
Spring Semester 2013
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Abstract

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European marriage rates have been steadily declining since the 1960's, a part of the second demographic transition largely attributed to the individualization of values. In 1998, Swedish marriage rates reversed into an incline, surpassing the European average in 2004. This reverse is particularly interesting as Sweden has been an international forerunner in the second demographic transition since the 1960's. As Sweden remain highly individualized, a theoretical gap in the relationship between marriage rates and individualization is exposed. This thesis argue that ideational individualization is insufficiently theorized if understood as a set of erosive values, and must instead be considered a mode of discursive organization to account for its complex consequences. To demonstrate this empirically, three focus groups of young Swedish adults were employed to produce normative discourse data. Analysis of this data shows how the contemporary Swedish marriage is discursively organized in such a way that it cannot be understood as endangering individualized values. Due to the individualization of the marriage institution, and social organization in general, it may no longer be a matter of about marrying in spite of individualization but because of individualization.

Keywords:

Swedish marriage, marriage rates, individualized values, individualized discourse, focus groups, discourse analysis.

Table of Contents

List of tables and figures

1. Introduction

European marriage and fertility rates have been continuously decreasing since the 1960's, while divorce rates have increased (Eurostat 2013). This demographic pattern, known as the *second demographic transition* (the SDT), has gradually been spreading from northern Europe to the rest of the western world and possibly beyond (Lesthaeghe 2010). However, in 1998 Swedish marriage rates unexpectedly reversed into an increase (Eurostat 2013). Sweden has previously been a demographic forerunner in the SDT (Van de Kaa 2002, Surkyn and Lesthaeghe 2004), which makes the study of this reverse is particularly interesting, especially since current theorizing on the causes of the SDT has been unable to explain the Swedish reverse.

Previous research and theory suggests that individualized values—such as individual autonomy, self-actualization and the rejection of traditional authority—have played an important role in propelling the SDT (Surkyn and Lesthaeghe 2004, Lesthaeghe 2010). However, according to Ohlsson-Wijk (2011), the reversed Swedish marriage rates cannot be attributed to alternative explanations such as marriage postponement or changing demographic compositions, and at the same time, there are no signs of decreasing individualization in Sweden. Ohlsson-Wijk suggest that "new theorizing may be needed to explain the mechanisms driving marriage trends and the role of values" (p. 185).

This thesis address the mechanisms that make increasing marriage rates possible, despite highly individualized values, by analyzing normative discourse of young Swedish adults, aged 20-30, reproduced in three focus groups. This analysis shows how a sophisticated discourse theoretical framework is necessary to understand ideational individualization and how individualized values currently relate to the marriage institution.

Individualized discourse has previously been shown to hide and support the reproduction of traditional gender structures despite a high regard for gender equality (Eldén 2012). The analysis in this study demonstrations how an individualization of ontological discourse also can protect the marriage institution from being problematized as contradicting individualized values.

1.1. Background

What has been called a second demographic transition begun by the end of the 1960's in the Nordic nations of Europe (Surkyn and Lesthaeghe 2004, Lesthaeghe 2010). This SDT is characterized by decreasing rates, and postponement of, marriage and fertility, increasing non-marital cohabitation, and a rapid increase in childbirths outside of marriage (Figure 1 illustrates how dramatic this increase has been in Sweden). The patterns of the SDT was initially attributed to economic recession, but demographers now recognize shifting values as a key factor.
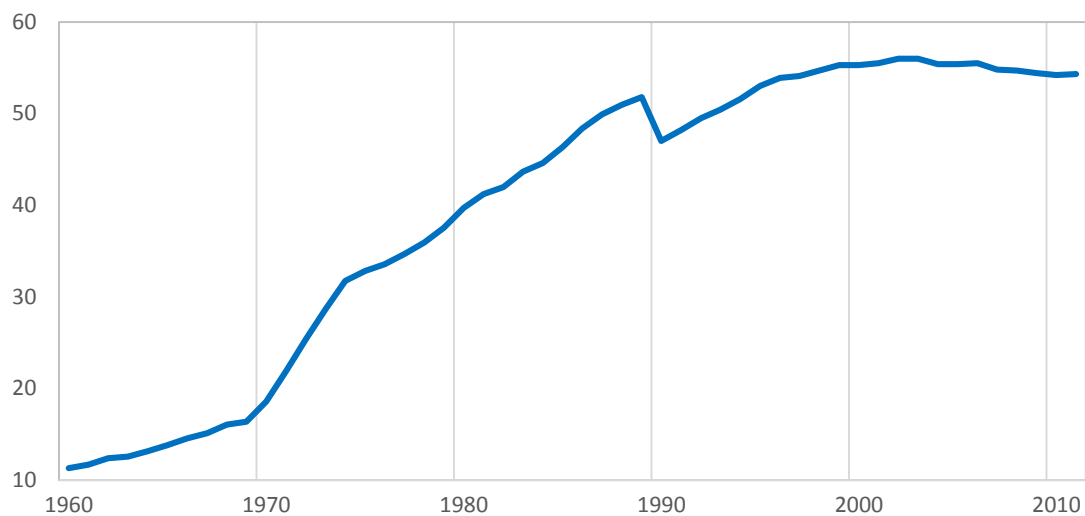
Figure 1. Percentage of births outside of marriage in Sweden.
Source: Eurostat, 2013.

During the three decades up until the 1990's, some of these patterns did spread further beyond the Nordic nations, but only to the western parts of Europe, North America and Australia/New Zealand (Surkyn and Lesthaeghe 2004, Lesthaeghe 2010). After the 1990's this changed rapidly as central and southern Europe followed the north/west demographic patterns. Some of the SDT patterns has also been shown to spread towards Eastern Europe, but this spread appears to be selective. Once again, economic factors were initially pointed out to be causing the spread of the SDT, such as high unemployment and the dismantling of state welfare, but it soon became evident that economic factors alone were not a sufficient explanation for these robust patterns.

1.1.1. The Swedish marriage

Figure 2 shows that through the end of the 1960's and into the early 70's there was a rapid drop in Swedish marriage rates by about one third, which put Sweden far below the European average in less than a decade. This was followed by a slow decline over the next thirty years, with the exception of the slight increase in the mid 70's and the spike in 1989. In 1998, the long and slow decline associated with the SDT patterns suddenly and unexpectedly reversed, surpassing the continuously declining European average in 2004. This reverse has also been associated with increasing fertility rates (Eurostat 2013).
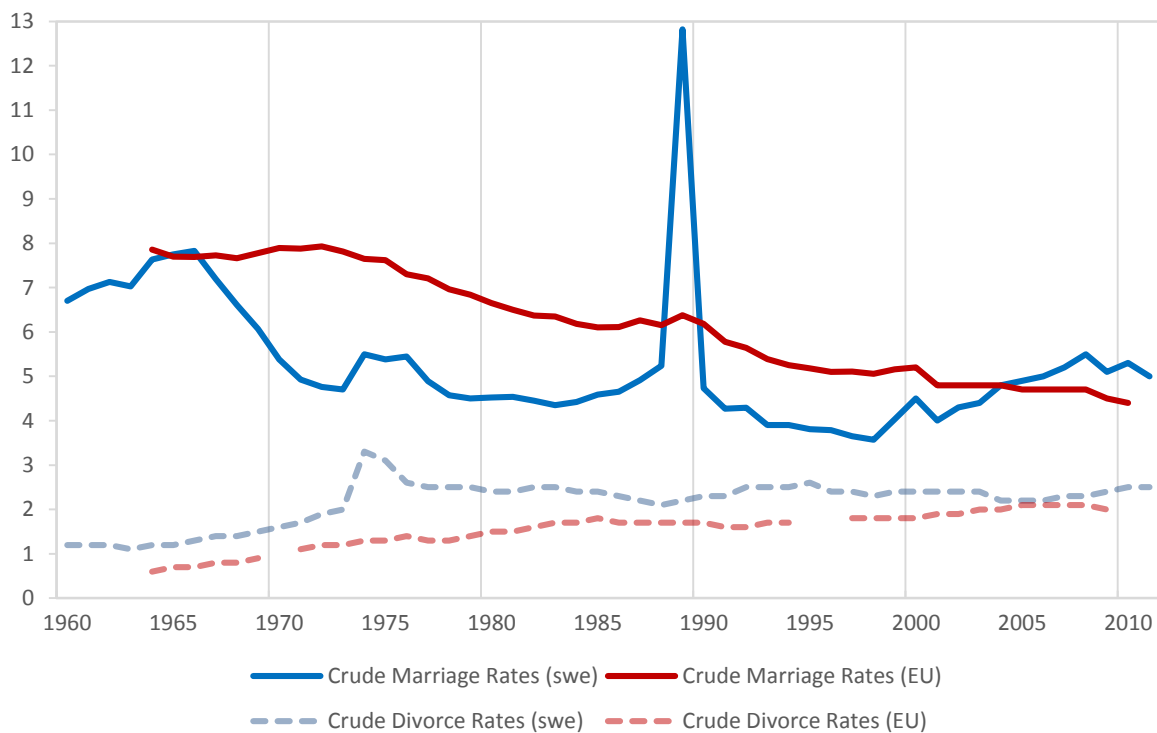
Figure 2. Crude (unadjusted) ratio of marriages and divorces per 1000 citizens in Sweden and the EU since 1960.

Source: Eurostat, 2013.

The effects of legislative changes are clearly observable in the Swedish marriage rates in figure 2 at two points; the slight mid-1970 increase and the immense spike in 1989. The small increase in the mid 70's is attributed to a reform that made divorce significantly quicker and easier than before (Agell 1985). The spike in 1989 is attributed to a reformed pension law (Hoem 1991). From 1990 and onwards, the pension law was further individualized so that widows would no longer receive a pension based on their deceased husband's income. This formulated the law in gender-neutral terms and reduced the economic impact of marriage. However, anyone who

married before the new law came into use would receive a pension based on the old system, a strong incentive to marry in 1989.

Declining marriage rates have generally been associated with increasing unmarried cohabitation of couples (Eurostat 2013). Cohabitation has been suggested to act as a kind of 'trial marriage' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995), and it has been claimed that it is now normative in Sweden to cohabitate a period before marrying (Andersson and Philipov 2002). The popularity of cohabitation has led to legal reforms aimed at strengthening its legal status compared to the marriage.

Significant differences between cohabitation and marriage nonetheless remain. Swedish cohabitants have no rights to inheritance, they are not economically responsible to support each other and the law does not automatically recognize paternity of fathers (Arvsrätt 2012, Regeringskansliet 2012). The couple may not assume a shared family surname and may not adopt unless married (Föräldrabalk 1949:381).

The Swedish marriage law has been increasingly individualized in recent decades through secularization and the introduction of gender- and sexuality neutral formulations (Äktenskapsbalk 1987:230). Some traditional elements are nonetheless retained in the marriage law, such as assumed and enforced monogamy and a presupposed connection to family formation. The Swedish parental insurance law has been individualized in a similar way and can now be divided between the parents, to a large degree regardless of gender (Föräldraledighetslag 1995:584).

According to Ohlsson-Wijk (2011), a majority of Swedes still marry eventually during their lifetime in spite of the weakened legal incentives compared to cohabitation. Other researchers has shown that the Swedish marriage is associated with plans of having children (Moors and Bernhardt 2009), and in particular the first childbirth (Baizan, Assave and Billari 2004). In a study conducted shortly after the 1998 turn in marriage rates, young Swedish adults reported a commitment motive as a primary reason to marry (Bernhardt 2001).

1.1.2. The role of individualized values

The idea of a second demographic transition was originally introduced by van de Kaa (2002) and further elaborated by Surkyn and Lesthaeghe (2004, Lesthaeghe 2010). It is according to Ohlsson-Wijk (2011) is the most prominent demographic theory in explaining the previous fall in marriage rates. The theory attributes the demographic changes during the second half of the 20th century to the shift of values from traditional conformative values toward individualized values (Lesthaeghe 2010).

Surkyn and Lesthaeghe (2004) analyzed data from the 1999-2000 European Value Survey of seven nations divided into three geographical clusters (Scandinavia, Western Europe and Iberia). They found a pattern robustness across the three clusters indicating that a "cultural factor" is indeed a necessary, but not alone sufficient, causal factor behind the SDT. The association between value orientation and household type identified by Surkyn and Lesthaeghe persisted in all regions when controlling for age, gender, education, profession and urbanity. Having children was also associated with a conformist orientation toward traditional values, and so was being married, while cohabitation and childlessness was associated with individualized values. This put childless cohabitants at one end of the spectrum and married parents who never had cohabitated on the other end.

The causal role of individualized values is however problematized by the 1998 turn in Swedish marriage rates (Ohlsson-Wijk 2011). Weakened individualized values seem unlikely to have caused the Swedish turn and there are no indicators of this. According to the World Value Survey (2009), the percentage of Swedes agreeing to the statement that 'marriage is an outdated institution' has even increased from 16,4 in 1996 to 22,1 in 2006.

In a recent study, Ohlsson-Wijk (2011) could rule out some plausible alternative explanations through statistical analysis. Postponement could not alone explain the 1998 turn in marriage rates, and the reversed rates remained when controlling for age, country of birth, urbanity and education. Compositional changes in labor-market activity and childbearing patterns among never-married women could only partially explain the reversed rates. Ohlsson-Wijk concludes that the statistical reversal is indeed genuine and that the role of values is of considerable interest. As the mechanisms of these values are not sufficiently theorized, she calls for theorizing, in particular as Sweden has been a demographic forerunner.

1.2. Objective and Research Question

This thesis aims at theorizing the mechanisms and role of ideational individualization in relation to the recent reversal in marriage trends. The objective is to propose a comprehensive approach to thinking about ideational individualization, capable of accounting for the Swedish reverse without dismissing previous research and theorizing on the SDT. This is achieved through an empirical study of normative discourse on marriage, with the goal of showing how marriage can be a conceivable and even attractive institution to young adults in contemporary Sweden. Using discourse analysis of focus group sessions, the study is addresses the following research

question: *What is the role of individualized discourse in constructing the marriage as a possible and attractive institution to young adults in contemporary Sweden?*

With normative discourse as the focal point, certain delimitations follow: the empirical study is not designed or intended to study the decision to marrying *per se*, neither is it intended to answer the question of why people marry, what the social function of marriage actually is or how this discourse has been brought about. Normative discourse can nonetheless be assumed to play an important role in the decision to marry, from even making it a considerable option to legitimizing its normality and establishing its value.

1.3. Outline

The structure of the thesis is divided into five main chapters. This introducing chapter contains the groundwork and problem of the thesis. It gives the reader an overview and background knowledge of the research problem, and leads up to the objectives and research question. In the following theory chapter, a theoretical framework is elaborated by fusing individualization theory and discourse theory, which provides the analytical tools required to meet the objective and answer the research question. The third chapter covers scientific positioning, the decisions made in the empirical research design, and the empirical and analysis procedures. The analysis of the empirical material is covered in the fourth chapter, where theory and empirical data are brought together and the results are presented. Finally, the last chapter summarizes the main conclusions from the analysis, thereby answering the initial research question, followed by a discussion of the implications of this analysis.

2. Theory

This chapter is divided into three sections. The two first sections covers general theories of individualization and discourse, the theoretical backdrop of the thesis. The reader who is familiar with individualization theories or Foucauldian discourse theory might wish to skip these parts. The third section builds upon the previous two to show how ideational individualization can be theorized as organizational feature of discourse.

2.1. Individualization in Late Modernity

The second half of the 21st century saw a rapid individualization of western societies and an erosion of traditional social institutions. *Individualization* is here defined as a collection of processes that supports a social organization in which the individual is the basic unit[1]. In conceptualizing the workings of individualization, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) use the concept *disembeddning* as a key mechanism to designate the separation of individuals from their immediate context of social institutions.

Several individualization processes, such as the emancipation, the development of the welfare state and secularization, have had had the goal of disembedding the individual from the influence of social institutions (Beck och Beck-Gernsheim 2002). These disembedding processes are motivated by a pursuit of what Berlin (1958/1969) once called positive liberty; freedom from inhibition by social structures. Put in other words, the institutionally reorganizing processes of individualization are driven by individualized values, such as those identified by Surkyn and Lesthaeghe (2004) as propelling the SDT; a strong emphasis on individual autonomy, rejection of the authority of traditional institutions and the pursuit of self-actualization.

The the pursuit of positive liberty has in Sweden been facilitated by a political ideology of state individualism, in which policies re-distributing social recourses are organized around the individual as the basic social unit (Tomasson 1998). This state individualism, where the goal of the welfare state is to support individual independence from all social institutions, is according to Berggren and Trägårdh (2009) unique to Scandinavia.

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[1] In a highly individualized society political policy, moral discourse, the labor market and social rights primarily refer to individuals rather than the family, household or kinship dynasty.

Theorists such as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) and Bauman (2003), view the individualization as a double-edged sword to close relationships, which simultaneously become freer and riskier. Individualization bring "uncertain freedom" now that two disembedded (i.e. different and autonomous) individuals, with different desires and life-trajectories, have to coordinate and negotiate their lives together.

> As long as there were strict commandments and prohibitions regulating married life and daily routine, it was fairly obvious to everyone what was correct, pleasing to God and natural. . . . The fewer firm regulations there are, the more we are expected to work them out for ourselves. (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995:91)

According to Beck (1992), the apparent autonomy, and associated responsibility for the consequences of choosing, has led to an increased awareness of everyday risks that have to be navigated one way or another. This *risk-awareness* is observable problematizations of romantic relationships in popular culture, such as the six-fold increased frequency of jealousy and adultery themes in drama titles since the 1960's (see Figure 3). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) asserts that this risk-awareness is related to declining marriage and birth rates as people employ *risk-diminishing strategies*, such as pre-marital cohabitation and postponement of childbirth, to safeguard their freedom to self-actualization.
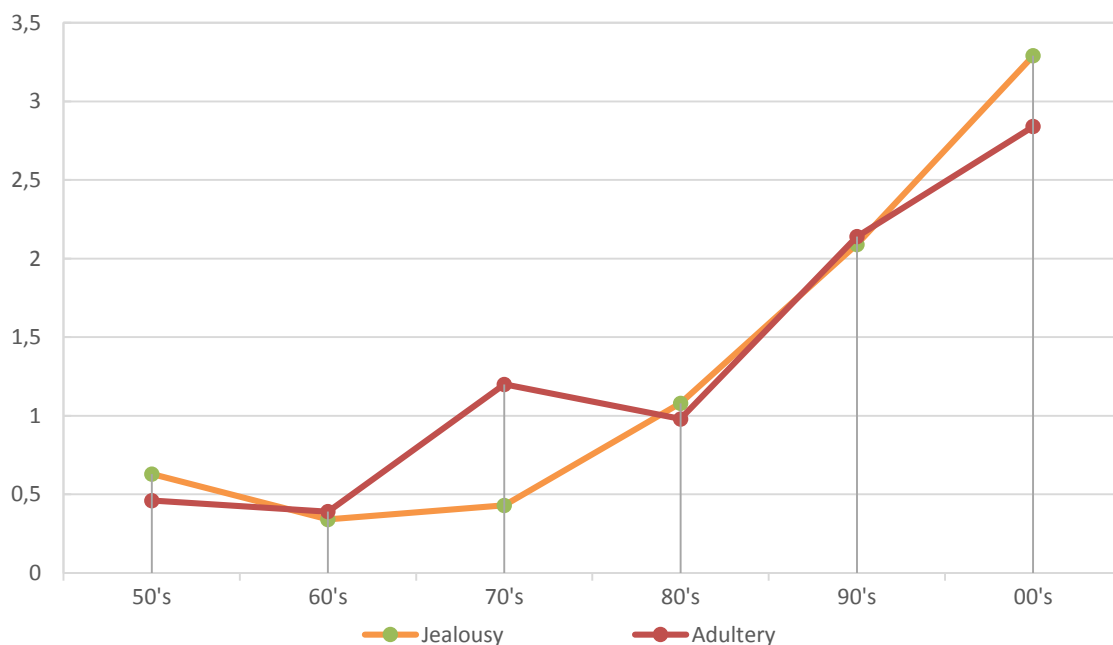
Figure 3. Percentage of drama titles tagged with the themes "jealousy" and "adultery" since 1950 in the IMDB database.

Source: IMDB, 2013.

As managing close relationships has become more difficult, and has become the sole responsibility of the individual, the self-help industry has flourished (Beck och Beck-Gernsheim 1995, 2002). Swedish self-help TV-shows have been shown to construct the 'good couple' of communicating, equal and autonomous individuals by navigating between the disembedded individual and generalized 'truths' about all relationships (Eldén 2012). 'Normal problems' are by the 'experts' in these TV shows generalized as unavoidable. To counteract these problems, and make two disembedded individuals compatible, an active *relationship work* is required. This work, for which the individual is fully responsible, consists of a continuous investment of effort and time, necessary to manage the relationship and protect it from various risks. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) identify the need to do such relationship work as a consequence of individualization, more specifically a consequence of the dissolution of explicit institutions that once held the couple together (see table 1).

Table 1. Institutions as centrifugal and centripetal forces to the couple during two phases of modernity, as suggested by key theorists. Slightly modified from Strandell (2012), drawing on Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995, 2002), Giddens (1993) Bauman (2003).

	Modernity	Late Modernity
Institutional support to the couple, acting as centrifugal forces.	Discourse of romantic love Locally shared experience/values The family/The household The marriage and religion Smaller local communities Economic dependency Gender binarity and roles Constrained sexuality	Discourse of romantic love The marriage/family (Cohabitation?)
Institutionalized centripetal forces.		Institutional reflexivity/risk-awareness Consumerist discourse on happiness Heterogeneous experiences/values The welfare state (State individualism) Availability of alternative partners Social mobility and urbanization Contraceptives, free abortion and non-reproductive sex

2.2. Discourse Theory

This thesis utilizes a Foucauldian concept of discourse elaborated by Laclau and Mouffe (1985). Foucauldian discourse theory offers a comprehensive framework for the analysis of meaning in cognition/culture. *Discourse* is henceforth defined as a cognitive and/or cultural logic, in the broadest possible sense. As the logics of culture and cognition, discourse is what arranges

experiences, thoughts and speech in meaningful and intelligible ways (e.g. understandings, explanations and expectations), constituting for example knowledge, norms, values and identities (Gee 2011).

Defined this way, the discourse concept encompasses everything thinkable (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). It includes, but is not limited to, the *explicit discourse* that is articulated through language in speech and written text (i.e. the things we can put into words). Explicit discourse is observable in the grammatical structure of articulated statements, which denotes the logic of the statement. The broad discourse concept also includes *implicit discourse* such as connotations, presumptions, and tacit cognitive/cultural logics[2]. Tacit discourse refer to the often unconscious and inarticulable cognitive working models people use to interact with the world (Gee 2011). Tacit discourse may be understood as the neurocognitive associations consciously available as intuition or feelings, such as 'just knowing what to do.' These cognitive working models facilitate social practices by dictating what and how things should be done, by constituting beliefs of what is normal, right and real (Gee 2011).

The distinction between ethical and ontological levels of discourse is also of importance. *Ethical discourse* is the logics of morality and values, while *ontological discourse* constitutes facts about aspects of reality. These often intersect in practice (i.e. 'if X is true, then Y is the right thing to do'), but the theoretical distinction is analytically important as the two by no means have to correspond with each other (i.e. the 'reality is X but it should be Y').

Discourse should not be understood as a homogenizing force; multiple discourses continuously struggle to define any specific field (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Contradictions and multiple possible understandings exists in all fields, allowing people room to maneuver and negotiate in social interactions and cognition. The contradictions of a field may be reproduced, even by the same individual, as long as they do not conflict in specific deployments[3]. When deployed separately, on separate discursive levels (i.e. explicit/implicit or ontological/ethical) and/or in separate contexts (i.e. different discursive fields and/or different actual interactions), discursive contradictions can avoid causing conflicting practices, articulations or cognition.

When conflicting, however, discourses may become *problematized*: the object of explicit meta-discourse such as irony or critical debate, which threatens to destabilize the discourse (Foucault 1996). What was previously presumed to be, and treated as, an objective fact may be

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[2] Other commonly used terms are 'figured worlds', 'discursive models', 'simulations', 'cognitive schemas' and 'representations.'

[3] For example, you may understand both creationism and evolutionism, but you may not explicitly refer to both of them as reality at the very same time in order for the specific articulation to be understood and accepted by others.

revealed as contingent through problematizing discourse (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). While meaning is in principle always contingent and constantly fluctuates, it is subject to friction that allows well-established discourses to appear as objective. It is through everyday articulations and practices that discourse is either reproduced as objective or challenged as contingent (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, Potter 1996).

The causal power of discourse is the consequence of it being treated as reality or truth (Foucault 1980). Cognitive/cultural logics enables certain actions as possible/desirable and disables other actions as unthinkable/unattractive by defining what exists, what could be, and what should be[4]. Power and knowledge are inseparable in Foucauldian theory; the power of a discourse is equal to the extent that it is considered reality/truth. Thus, the power concept in Foucauldian discourse theory thus refer to the productive capacities of discourse, it is not something oppressive which may be held by individuals[5] (Laclau and Mouffe 1985).

2.3. Individualized Discourse

Eldén (2012) has shown that individualization must be theorized as more complex and multidimensional than simply a set of values with erosive properties. Individualization also has the capacity to hide and protect the reproduction of traditional structures, such as gender assumptions. Following this conclusion, she advises re-thinking "understandings of individualization in sociological theories and the 'workings' of individualized narratives on cultural and individual levels" (Eldén 2012:3).

Discourse theory offers an analytical framework capable of accounting for both the erosive and productive capacities of individualization, without compromising the previously theorized role of individualized values in the SDT. Ideational individualization can be translated to this framework as *individualized discourse*, defined as any discourse organized around the primacy of the individual. Drawing on the work and concepts of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), individualized discourse can be understood as characterized by two features of discursive organization: *internal reference* and *discursive disembedding*.

In an individualized discourse, subjects and actions are disembedded. The doer and the done are understood and treated as free of any causal influence of the immediate social context. This

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[4] To exemplify; The Christian crusades are impossible today because they relied on the legitimacy of a certain way of understanding reality which has now lost its power to alternative discourses due to numerous problematizations.[5] Discursive power may be thought of as analogous to the concept of energy in physics: power is what makes things happen.

[5] Discursive power may be thought of as analogous to the concept of energy in physics: power is what makes things happen.

disembedding of individuals from institutions is achieved attributing causation to internal psychological states or traits (e.g. feelings, the free will or personality), which constructs the individual as autonomous. A consequence of disembedding is that the free will gets ethical supremacy as the final instance, as no external institution cannot justify restricting individual autonomy (Beck och Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Individualized discourse thus constitute the ethical and ontological foundation that both motivates and legitimizes of the values identified by Surkyn and Lesthaeghe (2004, Lesthaeghe 2010) as propelling the SDT.

However, as mentioned in the previous section, different levels of discourse do not have to conform. Highly individualized explicit discourses may be used to understand less individualized implicit discourses, such as the logics of institutionalized social practices. Eldén (2012) has showed that an explicit gender equality discourse can be reproduced at the same time as implicit traditional gender assumptions. The couples participating in the Swedish self-help TV shows studied by Eldén explicitly valued gender equality highly, but at the same time both the couples and the experts used an individualized discourse that left gender implicit and unproblematized.

Through internal reference, gendered differences can be reduced from normative social categories to individual differences of choice or character[6]. This disembeds gendered behavior from having a social context as it is either understood as freely chosen in a kind of social vacuum, or as innate to personality or the biological sex and thereby free of social influences. This discursive organization effectively *de-problematizes* gender as a contingent social construct; it prevents gender from being a possible object of explicit discourse. By framing the conclusions of Eldén (2012) in general terms of the workings of individualized discourse[7], I suggest that they may be analytically generalized and extended to other discursive fields than gender.

This discursive de-problematization of social institutions on the explicit level, which effectively supports their reproduction on an implicit level, is a consequence of individualized discourse organized through disembedding and internal reference. Any explicit discourse that understands individuals through internal reference has little room for institutions such as gender norms, these institutions consequently remain on the implicit level and cannot be problematized, and are thus reproduced unchallenged.

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[6] Behavioral differences are attributed to an autonomous will or inherent preference (e.g.' *I want* to have long hair'), rather than normative categories (e.g. 'girls *should* have long hair').

[7] The term used by both Eldén (2012), and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995, 2002), is actually *scripts* rather than discourse, a term that lack the comprehensive theoretical framework and analytical capacity of the discourse concept. This is why I have chosen to utilize and build upon the already well-elaborated discourse concept.

3. Method

3.1. Philosophy of Science

The scientific approach used in this thesis is what Jackson (2010) calls *analyticism.* This approach asserts that science is at its best it develops useful theoretical models, thus endorsing an instrumentalist view of valid science. The analytical narrative that is the product of such research is a theoretically generalizable model, not empirical generalizations.

According to Jacksons (2010), "analyticists offer the notion of 'singular causal analysis,' wherein scientific researcher trace and map how particular configurations of ideal-typified factors come together to generate historically specific outcomes in particular cases" (p. 114). Such an analysis results in ideal-type statements capable of organizing empirical data in a coherent model that "differentiates between analytically general and case-specific factors responsible for bringing about an outcome and the details in their sequential interaction over the time frame of the analysis" (p. 154).

There does not have to be a single valid analytical narrative, but one discourse analysis may nonetheless be more valid (i.e. useful) than another (Gee 2011). The validation science is an inter-subjective venture and consequently rule-bound (Jackson 2010, Gee 2011). This thesis strive to realize following four validation criteria, modified from Gee (2011):

1. Internal convergence into a complete and convincing model.
2. External coverage of, and coherence with, past and future empirical data.
3. Scientific cumulativity, or compatibility with established theory and other models.
4. Transparence in procedures and analytical conclusions, allowing inter-subjective evaluation of claims.

3.2. Discourse and the Focus Group

Any discourse analysis requires access to a suitable empirical material. This material can either be 'gathered' from pre-existing sources, or produced for the specific purposes of the analysis. Pre-existing material has the advantage of being produced without scientific interference, thus allowing the study of discourse in its use outside of the scientific context. The opposite alternative to this is to arrange a social interaction in which the deployment on discourse in specific discursive field can be observed. Framing and moderating this interaction allows some control of the context, which may particularly useful if no suitable material is available.

While marriage is frequently talked about in magazines, online forums and critical debates, none of these were suitable for this study as they are framed for specific contexts, audiences and purposes. This study required a situation in which the marriage was talked about in a general sense, without personal agendas or commitments.

The focus group is an excellent research tool for generating a specific, directly observable, social interaction (Halkier 2010). In any interaction of three or more individuals, 'the social' becomes prominent, distorting or hiding individual opinions and thoughts (Simmel 1917/1950). This is can be utilized as an advantage if the subject matter of inquiry is in the interaction itself or, as in this case, in the material generated by the interaction. Because the focus group is subject to the same social mechanisms and biases as any other social interaction[8], it is highly suitable for the study of 'the social', such as normative discourse, while it is directly unsuitable for accounts of factual matters such as prior behavior or thoughts and attitudes on sensitive issues (Bloor *et al*. 2001).

3.3. Empirical Method: Focus Groups

Focus groups should not be confused with group interviews. In a focus group, the participants do not simply answer questions, they converse with each other on a given topic. The researcher acts as a moderator, introducing topics and facilitating the conversation (Halkier 2010). This is however kept to a minimum. The overarching goal in participant selection, group composition and procedures is to facilitate spontaneous interaction between the participants (Merton 1956/1990). Used in this sense, the focus group has more in common with observations than interviews.

3.3.1. Participant characteristics and group composition

A strategic selection of participants with analytically important characteristics[9] was used (Neergaard 2001). Young Swedish adults (aged 20-30) were recruited because they are an ideal reflexive position 'in between families.' In Sweden, young adults are quite autonomous from their family of birth, and young adults have to "negotiate a set of risks which were largely

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[8] Groups are affected by social psychological mechanisms such as groupthink, social desirability bias, the desire for social consensus, the dominance of the majority and marginalization of minorities (Ruyter 1996, Nemeth och Nemeth-Brown 2003). This dampens and hides individual variation, but reveals normative discourse (Halkier 2010).

[9] It should be noted that gender was not one of these. Gender issues are not a part of the research question, which focuses on supraindividual normative discourse of generalized others, rather than individual experiences or attitudes. One group consisted of mostly males, another of only females and the third of mostly females. The dominant discourses did not differ between these groups.

unknown to their parents" (Furlong and Cartmel 2007:1). All of the recruited participants were Swedish citizens. By only recruiting unmarried participants I hoped to avoid defensive interest management (Potter 1996), as well as the risk that married participants were treated as more entitled to speak (Merton 1956/1990, Potter 1996).

The participants was recruited as pre-established groups of friends or co-students, as this makes recruitment easier and makes it easier for the participants to engage in productive inter-action (Halkier 2010). The participants lived in or near the metropolitan city of Malmö and they were all highly educated, the majority being students and the rest graduates. According to Merton (1956/1990) "the more socially and intellectually homogenous the interview group, the more productive its reports" (p. 137), facilitating spontaneous interaction more than any other factor, even outweighing a smaller group size. Thus, the shared education level might have been a benefit to this study, but it also means that any claims are limited to educated urbanites.

In reviewing the literature, Halkier (2010) found that successful groups can be composed of about 3-12 participants. The main risk with a large group is that it becomes unwieldy, demand-ing to moderate and difficult to transcribe (Merton 1956/1990). In order to promote an informal dialogue and ensure a manageable group size, a limit of maximum of 6 participants was set. This would still allow a dropout or two. The main risk with a too small group is, on the other hand, that it might generate too little interaction (Halkier 2010). In setting the minimum size to 4 participants, I hoped that using socially homogenous groups of people who already knew each other would offset some of the social friction and counteract the small group size.

The recorded conversation of three groups were used in this study, one pilot group co-administered with two co-students at a prior occasion[10], and two additional groups administered solely by myself. While the number of groups was limited for practical reasons, a surprisingly high degree of empirical saturation was achieved by the third group. Although some novel narratives did emerge, they largely reproduced the same discourse of marriage as in the two prior groups.

3.3.2. Procedure

My primary concern in my own interaction with the group was to create a relaxed environment suitable for an informal conversation. This was achieved through my own demeanor, friendly rather than distanced, the framing of the situation as an informal conversation over a cup of

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[10] See acknowledgements.

coffee and the structure of the sessions, designed to start easy following an introduction and a reassurance of anonymity.

The sessions were structured using a funnel model, beginning with nondirective (broad, open and explorative) questions and ending with specific questions of interest (Halkier 2010). Initiating the session by introducing with nondirective questions lets the participants set the agenda (May 2011), while more control and structure is more fruitful toward the end (Merton 1956/1990). The nondirective questions were designed not to fix attention to any specific aspect of a topic. Each nondirective question was followed by a probing process of progressive specification, in which the participants discussed, explained or elaborate aspects of their statements.

One of the main obstacles to overcome in a focus group is the participants' self-inhibition in regards to speaking directly to the group (Merton 1956/1990). Using participants who already knew each other was one way of reducing this inhibition. Another way in which this was dealt with was to be explicitly clear in that I was interested in a very general, third-person, conversation—nothing personal or sensitive had to be mentioned unless the participant themselves wished to do so as a part of a statement. To convey approval of uninhibited opinions I expressed interest in, and an open attitude to, whatever the participants talked about.

It is as always important to acknowledge the researcher's role in the production of data. The moderator has two main tasks; to initiate interaction between the participants and to manage the dynamics of the group (Halkier 2010). The introduction and presentation is of the same importance as in interviews as it frames the context for the interaction (Halkier 2010, Merton 1956/1990), which in turn determines the discourse repertoire the participants will use. I was seated as one of the group to reduce the impression of a traditional authoritative interviewer and to facilitate an informal conversation (Merton 1956/1990).

Items were sometimes used as tools to stimulate interaction (Halkier 2010), such as a newspaper article on Swedish women postponing childbirth into their 40's, and a Swedish book criticizing the marriage institution (Sveland and Wennstam 2011). The sessions were followed by short debriefings in which the participants could feedback their experiences (Halkier 2010). During these debriefings the participants expressed positive opinions of the sessions, stating that the group size and the open non-directive phase was appreciated.

The sessions were audio-recorded using a digital recording device. While social interaction includes much more than just explicit articulations, such as gestures, facial expressions and tone of voice, I chose to exclude this from the analysis. This was done both for several reasons beyond practical ones. First, the focus groups were not used to study interaction *per se*, but as a tool in order to generate a suitable material for the analysis. Secondly, I wished to avoid

hidden hermeneutic interpretations, which would be difficult for the reader to validate. Finally, pictures of for example facial expressions would compromise the participants' anonymity.

3.3.3. Ethical concerns

Great care was taken to inform the participants in each group of the purpose of the focus group sessions and their conditions. The participants were informed of the subject matter, the procedures, that participation was voluntary and could be terminated at any time, that a recording device would be used, and that these recordings would be anonymized, transcribed and quoted. I ensured that these terms were understood by all the participants before each session.

3.4. Analytical Method: Discourse Analysis

The entire recorded material was fully transcribed, without pre-judging its analytical value, to allow a thorough and systematic analysis (Halkier 2010). This enables the researcher to move back and forth during the analysis, so that what was initially deemed insignificant may be revisited before drawing any conclusions (Gee 2011). The data was anonymized during the transcription by giving each participant a unique code, consisting of a letter (participant) and a number (group). The data was thematically categorized prior to the analysis, and coded during the analysis, using computer-assisted analysis software (QSR NVivo, version 10). This was based on cross-group supraindividual themes, as individual narratives are irrelevant to the subject matter.

3.4.1. Discourse analysis as method

Discourse analysis is necessarily intertwined with discourse theory (Gee 2011). While discourse analysis to some extent relies on the researcher's experience with the discursive field, Foucault was very clear in that the analysis of discourse is not a matter of hermeneutic interpretation (Foucault 1972). The analyst does not question statements as true or untrue, or tries to find out what they really mean as to reflect a hidden reality, but analyzes the semantic and grammatical structure of statements in order to highlight their logic, and its consequences.

For discourse to be socially meaningful, it has to be supraindividual and intertextual; it has to be shared with others and relatively stable across different contexts (Rose 2012). While individuals may strategically deploy discourses from a field's repertoire, they cannot control the available repertoire or the relative power of discourses (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). This

necessary supraindividual and intertextual nature of discourse is a prerequisite for the discourse analysis to be meaningful, and the basis for analytical generalizations beyond the specific empirical context. However, the possible claims of an analysis is nonetheless always limited by the empirical material and contextually dependent to some extent. The analysis is also unavoidably limited by the skill, experience and knowledge of the instrument (i.e. the analyst), and the fact that all discourse is always continuously changing at one rate or another and are in practice never as clearly delimited as an ideal-type discourse model.

3.4.2. Analysis procedure

Discourse analysis is a matter of identifying and mapping the internal logics of, and the relations between, the discourses in a discursive field. This mapping was developed by analysis of discursive organization, power relations and attributions of causation in articulations. While explicit discourse is per definition directly observable in the grammatical structure of a statement, a set of 'thinking devices' was used to render implicit discourse observable (Gee 2011). The following set of questions were used as tools in analyzing discursive organization:

- What is done, or achieved, by a certain statement?
- Is any boundary work being performed (defining what something is or is not), and/or implicit definitions?
- What are the prerequisites of the statements, what presumptions are reproduced?
- What could potentially be said, but is not?
- Are any value/ethical judgments made or implied?
- What subject positions are reproduced?
- What is the context of the statement and is its relation to the statement?
- Are any statements, or presumptions, contradicting each other? If so, are the contradictions problematized or unproblematized? How are contradictions handled?
- What statements are treated as facts and what statements are challenged?

Identified patterns and functions were coded in a layer of analytical coding on top of the thematic coding, using the same computer assisted analysis software (QSR NVivo 10). The coding process was dynamic rather than linear; understanding the functions and effects of certain statements sometimes illuminated the functions and implications of previous statements.

During this analysis the relative power of the discourses deployed by in each theme were analyzed by using the following guidelines and concepts as tools:

- Is there consensus or are antagonistic alternative discourses present, simultaneously, at different times, or on different topics?

- Are the participants able to explain, justify or argue their statements and/or presumptions by reference to other well-established discourses?

- Do the discourses retain their logic in different contexts? I.e. are they stable across the three groups?

- What degree of certainty is expressed? The modalization hierarchy of Latour and Woolgar (1986) was used, ranging from "X is Y" through statements such as "I know/believe/think that X is Y" and "X might (possibly) be Y" to definite negations; "X it is not Y."

- Are statements constructed as objective or given through techniques constructing subject-independence, such as claiming universal consensus (Potter 1996), or using *active voice acting*; speaking as if quoting someone else or generalized others (Woolfitt 1992). Other discursive techniques for constructing objectivity include *externalization devices*; grammatical structures and statements that reify the object of the discourse as existing beyond or prior to human agency (Woolgar 1988), and *zero focalization*: narrating from an 'objective' point of view (Genette 1980).

Finally, attributions of causation were analyzed regarding how the speaker explained behaviors or consequences in a particular statement (Malle 2004), by referring to internal factors—what Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) call internal reference—or external/structural factors.

4. Analysis

The data from the focus groups are in the following analysis represented by transcript excerpts[11]. The excerpts were translated from Swedish with as little modification to the original structure as possible, unless a direct translation would lead to significant semantic confusion[12]. When the original articulations included incorrect grammar, it was left untouched to avoid unnecessary interpretations hidden from the reader.

4.1. The Dual Function of Marriage

When the participants were encouraged to discuss why people marry., two explicit themes of reasons for marrying were reproduced across the groups. Marriage was understood as a matter of legal practicalities and/or a symbolic declaration, directed toward others or to the partner.

4.1.1. Legal practicalities

Most of the participants initially talked about practical issues when discussing the purpose of marrying. Several practical issues were introduced by the participants, all of which were of some kind of legal nature, often discussed in comparison with cohabitation. These practicalities were talked about as straightforward pragmatic choices, reducing marriage to a matter of playing by the legal rules for practical gains. This pragmatic discourse of was well established and uncontested; it was spontaneous, did not require any argumentation and it was never met with antagonistic discourse. The following three excerpts, from group two and three, illustrate how the participants talked about these issues:

> **A2**: I think it's something of *a pure economic practicality–*
> **MODERATOR**: Yeah?
> **A2**: –so *when people are having their children they think that it's practical to get married. I don't know why.*
> **B2**: Not having to discuss *the last name of the children*, perhaps–
> **A2**: Yes.
> **B2**: –then *it is* already settled somehow, so that *the children's future is, like, secure, through the marriage law*. But of course, there is always cohabitation **[Swe: *sambo*]** . . .
> **Someone**: Yeah.
> **C2**: But I think that it also gives *advantages when you take bank loans and such* . . .

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[11] A transcript legend chart can be found in appendix F.

[12] The original Swedish transcript excerpts can be found in appendix E.

Someone: Mm.

Here the marriage is explicitly understood as a "pure economic practicality," advantageous for "bank loans and such." Marriage is also practical when "people are having their children" and because the marriage law "settles" and "secures" things, such as "the children´s future." Later on, the same group added two other uncontested cross-group legal issues; kinship and inheritance.

> **MODERATOR**: Uhm, when you say practical things, what do you think of then?
> [. . .]
> **A2**: *Surname*.
> **MODERATOR**: Surname.
> **D2**: And *when someone passes away*.
> **Someone**: Mm
> **D2**: *Inheritance*, that is.
> **MODERATOR**: Inheritance, yes, alright.
> **D2**: *It belongs to the one you are married to, <u>right</u>?*

The participants were, however, frequently unable to articulate exactly what the legal differences between cohabitation and marriage were on specific issues. This is observable in both of the above excerpts; A2 states that people think "<u>it's</u> practical to get married" when having children, but A2 "<u>don't know</u> why," and, in the last sentence of the excerpt above, D2 adds "<u>right</u>?" to seek confirmation on how inheritance actually work. However, the participants were explicitly clear in that marriage is of some kind of significant advantage, and never expressed any degree of uncertainty in regards to this, thus they reproduced it as an objective fact. A similar confusion over the details is observable in this excerpt from group three:

> **C3**: But you know this with– also that we become more and more materialistic and, and, capitalistic, one can say. *This with ownership*, and ownership forms, *<u>that's</u> a big difference in marriage and cohabitation*. That is *even if you live identical lives <u>there are</u> big legal differences*. So that's why I think marriage will remain because . . .
> **B3**: *If you chose to marry you enter that legal, then you have <u>kind of</u> chosen those rules*.
> **A3**: *<u>I don't even know</u> what the legal . . .*
> **C3**: Yeah, but if one of you, if someone, passes away or so . . .
> **A3**: Mm

This pattern of uniform agreement on the advantageousness, but uncertainty regarding the actual benefits, was reproduced cross group. The shared inability to explicitly articulate the details of these advantages, and that the discourse was shared and spontaneous in all groups, indicates that this advantageousness is a normative presumption.

4.1.2. A symbolic declaration of belonging

An alternative, but not antagonistic, discourse existed side by side with the legal-practical discourse. Almost as frequent as the practical reasons for marrying was articulated was a range of reasons that all served to declare love, commitment or belonging. This could be directed internally, toward the partner to show serious and long-term monogamous dedication, as in the excerpt below, or externally as a public statement. Some participants stated that the symbolic aspect was perhaps even more defining to marriage than legal practicalities, but the two were never in conflict:

> **A1**: To me <u>it is probably</u> more informal than what you say, the value is more that– that, *two people decide that they want to live together*. Eh, and that marriage kind of– displays that– eh– that *it displays to each other that this is the way you want it. You don't want to be with anyone else*. More that than the formal, the legal. That– <u>may not</u> matter as much. To me.
> **[. . .]**
> **A1**: Then *<u>it might</u> become a bit more definitive–*
> **E1**: Yeah.
> **A1**: *–than just being cohabitants* and–
> **E1**: Yeah, yeah maybe.

Note that the marriage is claimed to be a possibly "more definitive" form of belonging than "just being cohabitants."

   Love was mentioned in all groups, but not extensively discussed by the participants. It was talked about as something that may be displayed through the marriage as an additional step in a relationship. A pre-requisite for this to be reasonable is that the marriage must be understood as an additional, or possibly larger, declaration of love and/or belonging than for example cohabitation. The following three excerpts from different groups illuminate how marriage was understood as a symbolic declaration:

> **E1**: *<u>It is</u> a* **[. . .]** *victory* in the relationship, it shows that, *<u>it shows</u> the world and oneself* . . .
> **C1**: <u>I also think</u> that when, <u>though not as much but still</u> that, uhm, the wedding <u>can play a role</u>, that *you want to experience it–*
> **A1**: Mm.
> **C1**: –that *<u>it is</u> so big in our society*, that <u>it is</u> this big ceremony, to in*vite your friends and acquaintances and show off* a bit and– a bit of everything.
> **A1**: But you display, like, somewhere– I am stuck on this love thing! **[Laughs]** *You display love.*

Here the marriage is a "victory", and a way to show/show off/display love, internally and externally, and perhaps something that "you want to experience." Note the different levels of certainty in the statements. Marriage <u>is</u> a victory and <u>it is</u> a way to display something; these are statements of 'how things are'. The wedding ceremony is of much less importance in this

discourse, articulated only by a single participant and in less certain terms such as "I also think," "though not as much but still" and "it can" "play a role." It is also worth noting the subjects suggested to be invited to a marriage; "friends and acquaintances," not family or relatives—another example of disembedded discourse.

> **MODERATOR**: What's the role of love in marriage?
>
> **B2**: <u>I guess it is</u> *to show to yourselves and to others* that you suddenly have *decided* that *now <u>it is us</u>* and, mm– It becomes clear through . . .
>
> **MODERATOR**: So it is a bit like making a statement and– maybe displaying?
>
> **[Agreement from at least three participants]**

In the above excerpt, from group two, the marriage is once again understood as a symbolic declaration of belonging. This cross-group discourse was uniformly shared and unopposed. Group 3 explicitly stated that marriage declares belonging, and even ownership:

> **A3**: Yes, yes, but, like, yeah kind of, that it is a nice party, to *display your love*, and perhaps *to show, show to others that we belong together*, or, yeah . . .
>
> **C3**: Mm.
>
> **B3**: Exactly.
>
> **A3**: –change your last name, and have a ring on the finger, <u>it is a bit like</u>– yes, like *you belong to someone.*
>
> **B3**: Yes, yes <u>it probably is</u>.

In the discourse of declared belonging, the marriage is understood as establishing a social unit, showing others that you belong together, a kind of territorial claim. That this declaration could be understood as a claim of monogamous ownership is in the following excerpt implied in a joke made by A2, and later on in a statement of C2:

> **B2**: <u>It may</u> become *more of a change in how others view the relationship*, <u>*I don't think*</u> *that it will be any change within the relationship*, but from the outside, I mean *I can look differently upon a couple that is married compared to a couple which is unmarried*–
>
> **Someone**: Mm.
>
> **B2**: –that *it really becomes; "alright– you two–"*
>
> **A2**: **[in English]** *"He's off the market,"* or what?
>
> **[Many participants laugh]**
>
> **[. . .]**
>
> **C2**: <u>*I think that it is*</u> *if someone is jealous or so, then <u>it might be</u> like a proof to the other partner,* that *shows* him or her that I, uhm, that it is nothing to be jealous of, or something like that–
>
> **A2**: Mm.
>
> **C2**: –*but personality features <u>don't</u> disappear just because you have rings on your fingers.*

As is indicated in the previous excerpt, there was some ambivalence regarding whether marriage should be understood as 'doing something' to the couple or not. That marriage do change things was often presumed, but it was also both stated and presumed that the marriage does not change anything. Section 4.2.1 further elaborated this ambivalence.

4.1.3. Cementing the relationship

The two themes of reasons to marry were talked about as having centrifugal consequences for the stability of the couple, by legally and/or symbolically tying individuals together, thereby establishing, strengthening and stabilizing the couple as a definite unit. This is one of the ways in which the marriage could be understood as 'doing' something to the relationship:

> **A2**: It also <u>feels</u> like we said that <u>it is</u> traditional and . . . a natural step, where *you want to somehow be tied together with some other person. More than as cohabitants.*
> **[. . .]**
> **A2**: <u>It is as if</u> *you have stabilized the relationship* and kind of prepared to, well, take yet another step.
> **[Several participants agree]**

Here the marriage clearly has a cementing function, "more than as cohabitants," preparing the relationship for "yet another step" (see the next section). Below, group one talks about the establishment the couple as a single social unit wherein two individuals have at least parallel life trajectories:

> **A1**: You decide that *you want to live together with a person.*
> **MODERATOR**: Yes.
> **B1**: To me it is a lot of the, the formal, so to speak, kind of, like, the purely– *to make your relationship into a formal legally recognized relationship* in some way **[Laughs lightly]**, which is recognized by– yeah. You <u>somehow become,</u> like, *a household, more than if you just follow the cohabitation laws*, or how to put it.
> **Someone**: Mm.
> **C1**: Two people living together in *a fairly integrated life–*
> **MODERATOR**: Mm.
> **C1**: –doing things together, if you go to a party you go together, and stuff like that–

Here the marriage 'makes' the relationship "formal," establishing "a household," more definitely than unmarried cohabitation is legally capable of. However, understanding the married couple as a single social unit does not imply that it should be understood as the most basic unit of discursive organization, but a possible unit to refer to in some contexts.

Another way in which the marriage was understood as cementing was as an offering of safety, "like an insurance" giving you something to "rely on."

MODERATOR: What does marriage symbolize?
C1: *Faithfulness*.
E1: **[in English]** *Commitment*.
MODERATOR: To what?
C1: Uhm, to another person.
MODERATOR: Mm.
B1: *It is kind of* like an insurance. Uhm, of that *you can rely on something*.

The marriage was not only constructed as a cementing to the couple itself, it was also presumed to be centrifugal, or stabilizing, to families. Marriage could be a promise to your children that you are ready to do what is required when things get tough, thereby also implying an assurance of a long-term relationship:

A1: But to me it is a bit like *you have promised your children*, or future children, that *you will be together* and that *you will take care of them together*. That *you won't give up if it gets tough* and divorce.

One of the more frequently suggested consequences of marriage was that it would become more difficult to separate when married. However, the participants expressed ambivalence over this notion, as it implies that the institution has, or is allowed, control over individual autonomy.

In the following dialogue A3 expresses risk-awareness by stating that marriages does not really offer security because "[a]nything can damn well happen anyway," which B3 agrees to. While no one directly opposed the idea of relationships as inherently risky in any group, C3 remarks that there are structural factors in the marriage institution (here the divorce procedure) that do offer some certainty, which A3 and B3 at that moment agree to without hesitation:

A3: Yes, and I also think that maybe a lot of people feel, like, this that "when we are married, then it is us two," that *they see it as a kind of safety or security. But then it really isn't like that* . . .
B3: Yes.
A3: *Anything can damn well happen anyway*, but . . .
B3: uh-huh.
A3: Yes, it's–
MODERATOR: Mm?
C3: *It is a bit more difficult to go through the divorce–*
A3: uh-huh.
C3: *–than to just move apart.*
B3: Yes, exactly.

Aspects of security and risk-awareness in relation to the cementing capacity of marriage was also touched upon in group two:

> **A2**: Mm, and <u>maybe</u> that *if you have doubts* as a couple before, "is it we who are going to live together?" then <u>maybe</u> people think that "Yes, *let's get married, <u>then we will</u> both have decided,*" and <u>then no one can</u> get the idea that "well maybe it can change," because then *both can reject the other alternative, <u>which is</u> to go separate ways. So you can engage more into the relationship because then it's decided.*

> **B2**: <u>*It is*</u> *easier to break up with someone if you're not living together* and *even when you are living together <u>it is</u> a little bit harder* [when married], and when you are married *<u>it becomes</u> a lot more steps, like, steps to go through to get rid of this,* uhm **[Several participants laugh]**, *person . . .* That is to separate. It can be in a positive way too, that *maybe you fight a bit harder* and *solve the problems there is.*

Note the use of active voice acting in the first narrative; A2 quotes no one in particular but states something that anyone might say, thereby constructing his/her reasoning as subject-independent. So does the use of zero focalization in both statements. In both narratives, the marriage makes the relationship more durable, a discourse with high certainty modalizations that further enhances its objectivity, such as "<u>then no one can</u>," "<u>it is</u> easier," and "when you are married <u>it becomes</u>." This can be compared to the uncertainty regarding how other people think, such as; "<u>maybe</u> that if you have doubts" and "then <u>maybe</u> people think," which constructs these parts as possibly subject-dependent statement.

If relationships in late modernity are indeed as fragile as some theorists claim (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995, Bauman 2003), and are subject to a range of centripetal mechanisms (See table 1, p. 9), then the cementing marriage has an important organizational role beyond its symbolic value and formal advantages. In a highly individualized society characterized by risk-awareness, where the centripetal forces are many and the centrifugal institutions are few, means to establishing strong bonds between disembedded individuals are particularly valuable.

4.1.4. Marriage and the family/childbearing

A connection between marriage and having children was frequently presupposed by the participants. The word 'family' was however very rarely used compared to the frequency of the word 'children'[13]. The participants rarely invoked the family as a discursive unit at all, usually only when talking about something else, but referred to family formation simply as the couple 'having children.' This should not be interpreted as implying a negative attitude toward the family institution. It is nothing but an individualized discourse, in which the act of 'having

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[13] 13 versus 82 times in total.

children' is disembedded from the family institution. In other words, the family, as a discursive unit, does not play a primary role in the discourse of the couple with children.

The idea that marriage is 'practical' when having children was, as we have previously seen, one way in which the marriage was associated to children. When asked directly about any connection between marriage and children the participants B3 and A3 initially rejected this, but then changed their minds when C3 deployed a practicality discourse:

> **Moderator**: [. . .] is there any connection between marriage and children?
> **B3**: *No.*
> **A3**: *No.*
> **B3**: *I <u>absolutely</u> don't think there is.*
> **C3**: *<u>I think</u> that <u>it might</u> be for some because of practical reasons, so that if you come to have children <u>it gets</u> easier.*
> **A3**: Although, *if you marry <u>it is</u> expected that you are going to have children . . .*
> **B3**: Yes, <u>it can</u> be like that! <u>It might</u> be in that order.
> **A3**: But, *<u>it's not</u> like you're required to marry to have children*.
> **B3**: No.
> **B3**: Yeah <u>I think</u> that *today you can become a parent even if you're single*– You can live alone, so I'm thinking that– I don't know.

In the final statement, B3 invokes the possibilities afforded by the individualized Swedish welfare system. In group one and two the participants immediately recognized a possible, but uncertain, connection between marriage and children when asked about it:

> **B1**: It becomes *yet another step*, <u>I think</u>. That is to, for *some kind of lifeline*. That it, *that children belong to*. <u>*I don't know*</u> *if marriage comes earlier*, before, before the children. <u>I think it is</u>– essentially, like, normative kind of, that you . . .
> **E1**: *<u>It kind of</u> goes together*, if you have children you should also be together the rest of your life. The same goes if you marry.
> **[Several participants agree]**

The participants reproduce a commonly used normative-lifeline narrative, where marriage and having children can be understood as consecutive stages. In this excerpt and the previous one, the participants articulated the belief that a normative expectation connects the marriage to children. However, there was again an ambivalence regarding the details of causation, in particular regarding the temporal relationship between marriage and children on this lifeline. In the next excerpt, group two reproduces a similar discourse as the other two groups, and just as in the previous excerpts they express less than objective certainty in regards to the details, using modalizations such as "<u>I think</u>," which reduces a statement to a subjective opinion:

D2: *I believe there is some connection–*

B2: *Absolutely.*

D2: –<u>it can</u> be one way or another. As you said, *you marry before you have children, or have children and then, then* **[laughs]** *you marry because you have children*.

MODERATOR: So if you marry before you have children, is it with the idea of having children or is it just . . .

A2: Yes *I think* <u>it is</u>.

B2: Yes.

C2 & D2: Mm.

A2: <u>*It is*</u> a step in it <u>*I think*</u>. *If you want to have children* <u>*it is*</u>.

MODERATOR: So it kind of goes together?

A2: *If both want it, <u>otherwise it doesn't</u>.*

The presumed connection between marriage and having children was well established. However, when asked to explicate this presumption, the participants had some difficulty explaining how the two were connected without having to ascribe one institution or the other authority over the behavior of individuals. Such explanation would require understanding the institution as embedded in a context of other institutions, norms and moral demands, an explanation that would directly contradict the explicit discourse of disembedded institutions and autonomous individuals. This situation was common across several themes when a normative discourse that implied institutional causality was problematized and thus forced into explicit conflict with disembedded and internally referring discourse. A conflict which otherwise could be avoided as long as the two contradictory discourses was deployed in different contexts and on different levels.

When D2 laughs, in the previous excerpt, it is presumably at the absurdity of his/her own statement that implies that institutions somehow have causal power over individuals. A2 handles this conflict by attempting to return causation to the autonomous individual by deploying a discourse of internal agency. By stating that "[i]f you want to have children <u>it is</u>," and then "[i]f both want it, otherwise <u>it doesn't</u>," A2 repeatedly attributes the causation in the relationship between marriage and children to the free will. This intervention offers an explanation that resolves the conflict, and simultaneously rejects other potential discourses, with an absolute degree of certainty. In both these actions, the individualized ontology is treated as significantly more powerful.

Many examples can illuminate how the connection between marriage and children was talked about and/or presumed. The following excerpts reproduce the features of the discourse already covered in this section but are nonetheless interesting:

B3: Like that! But also that then, then <u>I think</u> a bit, like, or then *I <u>maybe</u> automatically <u>think</u> that "okay, now you really have plans to– in a very close future have children–"* That is, <u>there is</u> much that is added to it, or so, but *<u>I think</u> I make the appraisal that, that there are further plans after the wedding*, and then *<u>it becomes</u> so obvious that you have decided that you will go for it.*

[Agreement from several participants]

A2: Yes, but *it feels a bit like a package*, *if that's what you want* . . .

D2: Mm.

A2: <u>It's</u> *like a step*, first you marry and then you have children.

D2: Yes <u>it's</u> more connected that way *<u>I think</u>, that first you marry and then you have children. But it can just the same be that you first have children, that <u>doesn't</u> by itself indicate that you will marry* . . .

[Several participants agree]

A2: But today *it feels almost more common–*

B2: Yes–

A2: *–to have children first.*

B2: *–I agree* with that. Yes, *but it doesn't feel like–*

A2: *–no one believes that just because you get children you won't–*

B2: *–or I'm not thinking of it as that–*

A2: *–get married.*

B2: *–No exactly, but <u>it's</u> a goal nonetheless*, just as you say. I never think of it that way, that it is in that direction. That if you get children you will marry.

A2: Mm.

MODERATOR: Do you think it's common that people marry without any plans on having children or starting family in the future at all?

D2: No.

C2: No.

MODERATOR: Why

A2: No, *<u>it's</u> been discussed somehow in the relationship <u>I think</u>*.

In summary; while the marriage is not explicitly tied to the family institution, the presumed connection with children was well established in the three groups. This is in line with the research that has shown that strong ties remain between the marriage and plans of having children (Moors and Bernhardt 2009), first childbirth (Baizan, Assave and Billari 2004), birthrates (Ohlsson-Wijk 2011) and family values (Surkyn and Lesthaeghe 2004). The participants had clear, but somewhat inarticulable, understanding of these connections as normative. When the participants tried to explain this assumption explicitly, it was sometimes understood through a normative-lifeline narrative. More often, the participants deployed discourses where the marriage was used to support the family through its various cementing functions. Note also that the marriage and the family was at times understood as mutually supportive, such as when the commitment to the children was constructed as a motive for invested effort.

4.2. The Individualized Marriage

4.2.1. A disembedded marriage for disembedded individuals

In the explicit discourse of the participants, the marriage was highly disembedded, just like their understanding of individuals as socially autonomous. As mentioned in the previous section the family was rarely associated with the marriage in explicit discourse The Swedish marriage was also disembedded from possible ties to religion as no participant spontaneously brought up any type of association, neither positive, negative nor historical, between the Swedish marriage and religion. This is not to be interpreted simply as an expression of an atheist attitude but as an illegitimate discourse—the contemporary Swedish marriage was constructed as an entirely non-religious institution. When asked directly, all groups unvaryingly rejected such a connection as illegitimate:

> **MODERATOR**: Do you associate marriage to religion in any way?
>
> **B3**: No. Not like that.
>
> **C3**: *I can actually become annoyed when people just have to marry in church* when they aren't even Christians.
>
> **MODERATOR**: mhm?
>
> **C3**: I think *it's provoking*. In the same way as if you baptize your children in church.
>
> **A3**: *Mm*.
>
> **B3**: Yes, I wouldn't– *I have absolutely no intentions of marrying in church, if I would marry.*
>
> **Everyone**: No.
>
> **B3**: <u>*It's* so unnatural.</u>
>
> **C3**: Yes.

The above excerpt do not only show uniform agreement of three participants, articulated with a very strong degree of certainty. Perhaps more importantly, one participant claim that associating the marriage with religion is "provocative" and another participant that it is "unnatural." Both these articulations makes it clear that an atheist treating the marriage as a religious ceremony, even for possibly traditional reasons, is unacceptable and illegitimate.

While the groups quite often engaged a gender awareness discourse, no participant spontaneously talked about the marriage as a heteronormative or gendered institution. In the same way as the marriage was disembedded from religion, this was not simply a rejected idea, but the possibility of understanding the Swedish marriage as a gendered institution seemed non-existent on all levels. The participants appeared perplexed when asked directly about any possible gender aspects:

[The moderator makes a historical narrative of marriage and gender roles, and is met with silence]

A2: **[Surprised]** You mean *in a regular marriage*?

MODERATOR: Yes. Here in Sweden. In a couple.

Someone: Mm.

C2: *But I don't figure that . . .*

Someone: No.

C2: **[noise]** <u>It's more</u> about how *you choose to divide it yourselves*, *yes, you choose to do that chore*, kind of, or how you–

MODERATOR: Yes.

C2: –yes, how you . . .

A2: *Equality, kind of, choices.*

B2: Mm.

A2: With parental insurance and such. Who stays home with the children, if there are any.

MODERATOR: Mm.

A2: That, *that <u>doesn't</u> the marriage itself decide*.

The initial surprise, and the fairly certain rejections, suggests that gender aspects are at the very least not a part of an explicit discourse. This excerpt also shows that when gender awareness was called upon, the participants understood gender aspects as a matter of "equality . . . choices" where the communicating couple "choose to divide it yourselves." Doing a specific "chore" is here a consequence of a free choice that "the marriage itself" is unable to influence. Gender equality was thus discursively organized much like in the popular therapy TV-shows studied by Eldén (2012). An ethical gender awareness discourse is present, but gender is simultaneously de-problematized as behavior is understood through disembedded internal reference.

The discursive disembedding, and consequent de-problematizing, of marriage was perhaps most evident in the way these young adults talked about marriage as if it did not really change the relationship in any way, and was equally unable to change or the individuals involved in it:

> **C3**: <u>I don't know</u>, <u>it can be</u> more, like– That "*I am me, it <u>doesn't</u> matter if I have this or that surname, if I am married to you, it <u>doesn't</u> matter,*" or so, *I am me anyway.*

C3 uses active voice acting to achieve subject-independence when deploying a discourse of the socially autonomous, stable and coherent, self; "I am me anyway" and "if I am married to you, it <u>doesn't</u> matter," which at the same time denies the marriage causal capacity. This disembedded internally referring discourse constructs the marriage as without consequences. However, understanding marriage as impotent contradicts the construction of marriage as cementing function unattainable through cohabitation. The next excerpt is another example, from group two, of how the marriage was talked about as disembedded and impotent:

B2: And <u>it is, like</u>, *it's just a relationship*.

A2: Mm, exactly. *It's nothing that happens*, <u>it does not</u> *become different after that*, that you have married– So. Because <u>it is probably</u> *a reason for people to marry*– uhm– *who <u>maybe</u> have problems. And think that marriage can solve that.* Or that it is *like people sometimes have children because "something needs to happen now"* in the relationship, then the marriage <u>is</u> also a part of that trying to, mm, *trying to nurture the relationship* because *maybe it's stuck*.

Someone: Mm.

MODERATOR: But do you think that people change when they marry then? Or don't they?

B2: No, *not really* in the everyday stuff. <u>Maybe they don't</u>.

The disembedded Swedish marriage was often defined by the participants through discursive 'boundary work'; describing what the Swedish marriage is by comparing it to other eras and cultures. By deploying narratives of more traditional, not-yet-as-disembedded, marriage institutions, the contemporary Swedish marriage was constructed as highly de-traditionalized (i.e. disembedded from traditional institutions). In the following excerpt from a discussion in group one, D1 performs such boundary work by contrasting Sweden with Spain and deploying a narrative of Swedish gender awareness and progress:

> **D1**: But uhm, a gender equality aspect might play a big role depending on how it looks in countries that is, if you put it like this, *Sweden <u>has</u> come pretty far* and *there are countries that <u>maybe</u> just have begun the real equality work*. <u>I really don't know</u> how Spain is doing but *<u>I can imagine that it is</u> a bit like that*, and <u>then it becomes</u> like this– *Then <u>maybe</u> you haven't yet adapted laws and everything,* like, to become– and do it so that it's legally as equal as possible.

While the specifics of the Spanish progress is expressed with uncertainty modalizations as "<u>I really don't know</u>," "<u>I can imagine</u>," and "then <u>maybe</u>," the construction of Sweden as highly developed is treated as a presumed certainty. The logic communicated by D1 presumes that gender equality progress is linear, and Sweden "<u>has</u> come pretty far," further than some other countries, possibly including Spain. Gender equality is in this discourse a matter of explicit laws, which are given causal capacity. Laws are, however, quite idiosyncratic institutions of social control as they are very explicit and enforced by the state. With an understanding of the contemporary individual as autonomous explicit enforcement of another agent is the only real constrain of freedom.

In the next excerpt a similar understanding, of contemporary Sweden as a society of free individuals, is reproduced by group two. However, this time in relation to divorce and traditional informal social control:

> **B2**: *Today <u>it's</u> perhaps more accepted with divorce* and such and–
> **Someone**: Mm.

B2: –*it can end* and *people know each other more today* when you marry and **[noise]**– And I can imagine that, kind of, yes, *it's approved in another way*. Approved sounds like the wrong word but yeah. It's *maybe not such a big deal*.

Someone: Mm, no.

B2: *Before it was more, like, uhm, religion* and such, so that– You didn't divorce and it wasn't accepted.

The de-traditionalization narrative was likewise deployed in group three:

C3: No but I think it's a bit, like, only traditional– Yes but *around the 1940's* and there, then you married, or, *it was a way to support yourself for women*, right. *And– a norm and a rule*.

[Everyone agrees]

B3: Yes, *and if you wanted to have children you were maybe supposed to be married* as well, a bit like that maybe.

A3: It feels more like, you know, *a command*.

[Everyone agrees again]

B3: Yes and then it's like that when you entered a marriage and *it was, like, really for life, no matter what you felt*, or maybe a bit. Uhm, and today it's more like, well, I don't know–

C3: *Adaptable*.

B3: –*you are not as dependent on each other* in the same way. So, *you can divorce because "I can afford to support myself."*

The final statement made by B3 is yet another discourse that relies on the individualization of the Swedish welfare system. The de-traditionalization narrative is in the above excerpts uniformly agreed upon and uncontested in all three groups, it is deployed with high certainty modalizations and zero focalization, thereby reproduce its objectivity.

   To conclude, the marriage was highly disembedded. Constructing the Swedish marriage as highly de-traditionalized discursively disembedded the marriage from its historical contexts. Disembedding de-problematizes the marriage, removing aspects such as the family, religion and gender from its explicit discourse. This solves, or at least avoids, possible discursive conflicts to the same extent that the marriage is stripped of its immediate context. A relevant example is the possible conflict between marriage as religious and homosexuality, a conflict that can only exist as long as the marriage is discursively embedded in a religious context[14].

4.2.2. Fighting the downward spiral

In line with the expectations of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995), and Bauman (2003), the explicit discourse of the marriage as an impotent institution was frequently contradicted by implicit understandings of the marriage as constraining. There is an inherent conflict between

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[14] In Sweden, this public debate was prominent on a national level until the Swedish marriage law (SFS 1987:230) was reformulated in gender-neutral terms in 2009.

autonomy and belonging, and the marriage necessarily constraining to the exact same extent as it is cementing to a relationship. However, this, as any other discursive contradiction, is only problematic insofar as it results in explicit practical conflicts.

The participants rarely ever spoke of the marriage itself as constraining. They did however often imply this when they talked about aspects presumed to be associated with the marriage as constraining, such as living together, having a long-term relationship or having children. In the following excerpt, cohabitation is explicitly understood as more of a constraint to autonomy than marriage, or possibly even as the only constraint of the two:

> **[Discussing the notion of the day before marriage being your 'last day in freedom']**
>
> **B3**: Then *it was more like that the day you move in together*, yes, *before that is your last day in freedom*, it should be more like that then.
>
> **C3**: Yes exactly.

The next excerpt from group three exemplifies a presumed conflict between childbirth and self-actualization implied in talking about first childbirth postponement:

> **B3**: But then I believe that, you study longer, and also that maybe, like, after school, after upper secondary school **[Swe: *gymnasiet*]**, then maybe you travel a few years and study a few years, and then maybe you study some more, and work for some years, take the time to get the job that you want, and then time passes and you think that– maybe you should work some more– and–
>
> **C3**: *I also believe* that *people are* a bit more, like, *a bit more self-centered*.
>
> **B3**: Yes.
>
> **C3**: I mean, *it's not about* that– *I'd live through my kids*.
>
> **B3**: No–
>
> **C3**: That is, *my identity is not my children*–
>
> **B3**: Precisely.
>
> **MODERATOR**: Mhm?
>
> **C3**: –but *you are yourself much more*, and then *there's no need for children*.
>
> **B3**: No **[Agreeing]**.
>
> **A3**: And then *there are many more possibilities*. Like, my parents, they didn't have, it wasn't just, like, "let's go to Australia" but *both me and my sister, we just "Yeah well, we'll live there for a while" and went to Australia. It is so much more available, and then it becomes like "I want to do this first"* because you can.

The three speakers presume that postponement is a way to avoid becoming constrained by having a child, what Beck (1992) would call a risk-diminishing strategy. Sharing this pre-sumption is a necessary pre-requisite for their discourse to make sense. They also talked about an increase of possibilities for their generation to choose from; "there are so many more possibilities," and about doing things simply for the sake of self-realization; "people are . . . a bit more self-centered" and "you are yourself much more." Here having children is in

opposition to the individualized values identified by Surkyn and Lesthaeghe (2004, Lesthaeghe 2010). However, due to the disembedded discursive organization, in which children are separated from the marriage, this contradiction remains isolated to children. Individualized values are thereby not in direct explicit conflict with the disembedded marriage.

Instead of understanding the marriage itself as a constraint, all groups shared the well-established presumption that all relationships, in particularly those with children, have an inherent dynamic that grows more problematic over time. It was presumed that this dynamic invariably led all relationships to lose their initial emotional excitement:

> **A2**: Yes, I am completely, like– *the passion is still there, but the excitement, <u>it does not survive</u> in a relationship if you spend every single day with that person.*
> **B2**: No.
> **A2**: The passion is one thing–
> **MODERATOR**: Mm, okay.
> **A2**: –but the excitement, it– *the one who says there's still excitement in a relationship <u>is</u> a liar.*
> **[Several participants laugh]**
> **MODERATOR**: Okay.
> **A2**: Then <u>it can</u> last for one year, or three years–
> **B2**: My mum texted me that it lasts– uhm, 'falling in love' -part **[Swe: *förälskelsen*]** lasts, uhm, for a year and eight months **[Several participants laugh]**. It was precisely when me and my boyfriend had been [together that long], so thanks! **[Laughs out loud]**

This relationship dynamic was often described as a process, which could be staved off temporarily but never completely escaped. Group three called the struggle against this process "the great challenge" of relationships:

> **C3**: And *the lack of passion* and–
> **A3**: *To keep the love alive*.
> **C3**: Yes, that, *that <u>is</u> the great challenge*.
> **[. . .]**
> **MODERATOR**: [Is it a] common problem or a problem in all relationships, do you think?
> **C3**: Yeah but *periodically* <u>I guess it is</u>. I mean, *if you've been married for 25 years <u>it can't</u> always have been super fun–*
> **A3**: No.
> **B3**: No precisely, *everything <u>can't</u> be good*, what if you come to have children and– *those toddler years <u>must be</u> toug*h, <u>it can't</u> be perfect for the relationship, that is *<u>you'll have to</u> work to keep the love alive*, but somewhere there's hopefully some foundation to it.
> **A3**: Yes <u>I think</u> that love becomes, like– *excitement, or a bit more, like, 'the spark', becomes difficult*, because *the basic love is still there anyway*. Like, that you– do things for each other, and show appreciation, and you know– don't *take each other for granted*.

Notice the high certainty modalizations in these statements, and the way the participants talk about this dynamic as universal; "that <u>is</u> the great challenge," "it <u>can't</u> always have been super

fun," "everything <u>can't</u> be good," the "toddler years <u>must</u> be though" and "<u>you'll have to work</u> to keep the love alive." This is a discourse reproduced as an objective fact, in which everyone necessarily go through these experiences in any relationship. Taking each other for granted was talked about as one of the consequence of routinization of the relationship. Below the participants describes this as a struggle against a *downward spiral*:

> **A2**: That *maybe you are more sure on that "now it's us"* and then– <u>maybe</u> that risks doing– that, well, yeah, that *the fighting spirit is no longer . . .* **[slight laugh]** because then, then you have each other so that–
>
> **B2**: Mm.
>
> **A2**: –it <u>maybe</u> becomes even more that *you take each other for granted*.
>
> **MODERATOR**: Mm. Is it a bit connected to that excitement aspect maybe? Or boredom?
>
> **D2**: Yes *that's reinforced* then if you– uhm– like, yeah. If you take each other for granted in that way *you stop fighting* [for the relationship] like [A2] said *and <u>it becomes</u> a downward spiral.*
>
> **B2**: Mm yes.
>
> **A2**: *<u>That's</u> difficult to get out of.*

This unavoidable process of declining emotional excitement was reproduced as self-reinforcing and more difficult to resist over time, in particular with children. The discourse of the downward spiral was shared, presumed and unopposed across the groups. The participants did however, as is evident in excerpts both the above and below, invariably understand the process as something that could be actively resisted by 'fighting' for the relationship.

The participants did not spontaneously bring up any more specific risks. When directly asked about risks, group two and three talked about cheating as a risk, but attributed it to the same basic relationship dynamic—cheating was understood as yet another potential consequence of the downward spiral. In the following excerpt, A2 talks about this process using a zero focalization perspective, high certainty modalizations, and universalistic presumptions as externalization devices, which produces an 'objective' account:

> **[The group is discussing why married people sometimes cheat on each other]**
>
> **A2**: *Too little, uhm, intimacy, too little company* with– *alone*, when *the couple's child takes up too much time. The father turns into a direction of his own* and *the mother focuses on the child.*
>
> **MODERATOR**: And why is that?
>
> **A2**: Yes, well, because that, that *the children easily take over*, that *you forget your partner*, that <u>it</u> easily <u>becomes</u> *everyday routines* that *<u>are</u> difficult to break.*
>
> **MODERATOR**: Mm.
>
> **B2**: *Too little time to care for the relationship.*
>
> **A2**: *Time yes, exactly.*
>
> [. . .]
>
> **A2**: And then that *the excitement* <u>most often</u> *<u>disappears</u>* after a while–
>
> **B2**: Mm.

A2: –which, then, *can come back with time for each other*.

[. . .]

A2: [loss of excitement due to routinization] is *impossible to avoid*.

MODERATOR: is it?

A2: Yes I think so, absolutely. Then *you have to value the little things* and– what is– I mean, what you think is pleasant with the other person.

B2: Mm.

A2: It absolutely doesn't have to be romantic dinners or travels, I'm just thinking of music, taking a walk, or *taking the time for each other I believe is the key to a good relationship*, whether it is marriage or–

All features of the downward spiral discourse are reproduced in this excerpt by A2; the unavoidability of the process, the passing of time and routinization as causes, the loss of excitement as the key problem and the possibility of resisting or even temporarily reversing the process. As in previous examples of this discourse, the by A2 presumed child is understood as a catalyst to this process.

   If marriage is strongly associated with children, and children are assumed to facilitate relationship problems, one might expect these young adults to deploy risk-awareness toward the marriage. However, children are once again not associated to the marriage on an explicit level, only as a normative presumption, and neither is the downward spiral. The implicit connections are there, but they remain unproblematized. Another implicit association that could be problematized is that marriage is presumed to be long-term, and time as a factor in the downward spiral. D2 and A3 briefly touched upon this when talking about the cause of cheating:

> **D2**: It is easier– or *I think it's more common among married couples* that someone is cheating, than among couples who isn't married–
> **MODERATOR**: Yeah?
> **D2**: –but that is *likely just due to that married couples might have been together longer* than unmarried couples and then it's maybe more common, I don't know.

In the excerpt of A3 below, the passage of time is implied in the notion of boredom:

> **A3**: Well, *I think* that some do it maybe *for the excitement, because they are bored*. You want a little excitement.

If cheating is understood as a possible risk in marriages, it is ascribed to the passing of time and/or a lack of excitement. It is thus attributed to the downward spiral. This understanding has the consequence that cheating is constructed as something avoidable by effort, if only the process of the downward spiral is successfully resisted:

A3: Then I believe that *there might be something that isn't right* in the relationship. *There's probably many relationships that are bad*, and *people maybe just go on not doing anything about it*, and then it becomes– and *then something like that happens*. Someone might fall in love with someone else but doesn't dare to break up, and so– *if you've been in the relationship for long and have kids* that is.

MODERATOR: Mm.

A3: I think it can be a lot like that.

B3: *You don't actually want to ruin what you have*.

A3: No, *that people are afraid has very much to do with I think*. Afraid to, like– *maybe change ones situation*, uhm, or, yeah *maybe afraid to be hurt yourself*. If someone does it *for the excitement* or so, I believe that it might be due to fear of– committing, or getting hurt yourself.

C3: Mm.

The logic in this excerpt is that if what "isn't right" is fixed, if people did not just go on "not doing anything about it" and someone does "change ones situation," then cheating could be avoided.

A cross-group feature of the downward spiral discourse was a frequent reference to the *bad relationship*, which would only evolve if the process was left unchecked. Resisting the spiral required caring for the relationship through relationship work in the form of a continuous investment of time and effort. The bad relationship construct effectively contained the possible risks of long-term relationships, confining them to in a single construct that by effort could be avoided altogether through successful relationship work.

Much like in the discourse of relationship problems studied by Eldén (2012), this discourse is situates the causation of the developments of a relationship in psychologizations of individuals, such as the willingness to 'work' or personal traits. This internal reference has two important discursive consequences. First, it becomes possible to completely control the process and avoid the bad relationship. This attribution of causation transfers any threats to individualized values from the general institutional organization of close relationships to specific individuals. A consequence of this is that you can be convinced that certain risks are very common in marriages, but still feel that these things by no means have to happen to you:

D2: Well, when you're *in a relationship* yourself *you think like that*, like, *I'm currently not in a relationship so I think that it might as well happen to me*. But *of course*, *when I meet a guy who I trust I won't* think like that.

The harmlessness of the marriage institution is further enhanced by understanding the downward spiral as inherent in all relationships, regardless if the couple marry or not. The second discursive consequence of internal reference is that it enables personal failure in relationships, as the responsibility to do sufficient 'work' is ascribed to individuals.

When talking about a Swedish book advocating the attitude that divorce could be something positive (Sveland and Wennstam 2011), in the sense of freeing, the second consequence was raised as uncomfortable by group three:

> **A3**: Yes but <u>it is</u> like it says on the book, that *it shouldn't be shameful*. <u>It is</u> really horrible <u>that it should</u> be shame and guilt–
>
> **B3**: Yes.
>
> **A3**: –that getting a divorce, like, *just, because it didn't work out*–
>
> **B3**: No exactly.
>
> **A3**: –*of course you should look for* something, or, find *something better*. Then it doesn't have to be something better in another partner, it can just be *a better life*.
>
> **C3**: Mm.
>
> **B3**: But *<u>I think</u> society views divorce as shameful*.
>
> **C3**: Or *that feeling of failure <u>I think</u> that you feel*.
>
> **A3**: Yeah–
>
> **C3**: *<u>I suppose it is</u> like that*–

This is a good example of how contradictions on different levels can remain unproblematized as long as they are reproduced without conflicting in explicit articulations. In this example, the contradiction is between an explicit ethical discourse, in which divorce is a free choice for autonomous can thus not be criticized (with illegitimate traditional moralism), and the implicit ontological discourse in which people are responsible for the outcome of relationships. This level difference enables the simultaneous reproduction of contradictory discourses, much in the same way as an explicit high regard for gender equality may be reproduced along with implicit gender assumptions, as shown by Eldén (2012).

Making this distinction of discursive levels is only possible in a discourse framework, as is the notion of individualization of ontological assumptions, both of which are vital in order to understand how individualized values and increasing marriage rates may coexist in a certain discursive organization.

5. Conclusions

5.1. Summary and Synthesis

5.1.1. Why (still) marry . . .

When the young adults discussed reasons to marry, two well-established cross-group themes of explicit functions of the marriage emerged (see figure 4). In one discourse, to marry was a pragmatic decision with the purpose of attaining legal-practical advantages over cohabitation. In a second discourse, the marriage was constructed as a means of declaring definite belonging by displaying love and commitment. This declaration could be meaningful both as a public act and as internally directed toward the partner. These themes constructed the marriage as a cementing the couple, creating a definite discursive 'us'—a legal and symbolic discursive unit of two bonded individuals, stronger and more lasting than cohabitation.

In line with previously quantitative research (Baizan, Assave and Billari 2004, Moors and Bernhardt 2009, Ohlsson-Wijk 2011), the marriage was still tied to the first childbirth. However, the discursive connection to children was the normative presumption that marriage and children somehow tend to go together. This was a well-established but largely implicit discourse, but having or wanting children was not a spontaneously mentioned reason to marry.

The participants rarely mention the family at all, but they nonetheless often presumed that children was as a part of marriages. This suggests a strong implicit link between the marriage and the family. They talked about 'having children' as something individuals do, not families, thereby their explicit discourse disembedded the individual and the act from the family institution. This created ambivalence when trying to explain the presumed connection to children. A strong normative connection

Figure 4. Discourse model mapping the function of marriage.

implies that social institutions have authority over individuals, a notion that the participants repeatedly rejected as they understood individuals as autonomous (i.e. disembedded from
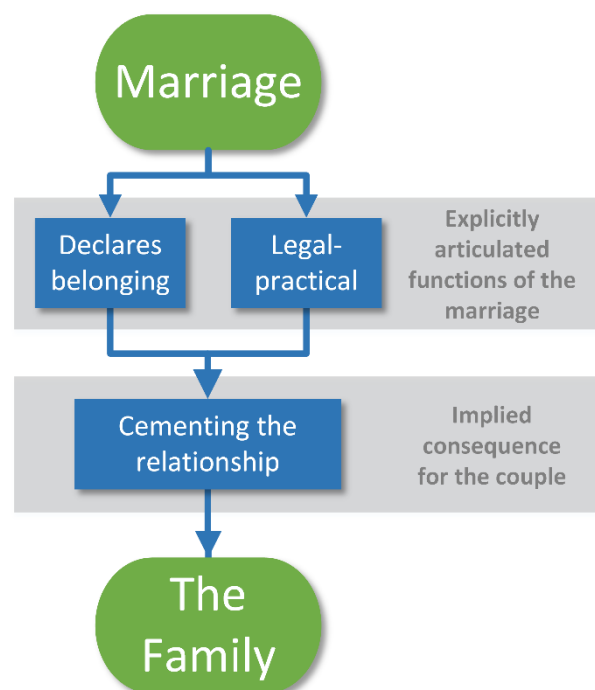
institutions). To avoid ascribing institutions authority, the participants were explicitly clear in that marriage was in no way necessary when having children (or the other way around), but the marriage was nonetheless often implied to support families.

In conclusion, what makes the contemporary Swedish marriage an attractive institution in the normative discourse of these young adults is its ability to cement the relationship into a stronger, more stable, belonging; together with various practical, legal and symbolic social benefits. Through this ability, the marriage was also understood as supportive to families.

5.1.2. . . . in spite of highly individualized values?

The key problem to this thesis, raised by Ohlsson-Wijk (2011), was how increasing Swedish marriage rates could be theorized as co-existing with highly individualized values. In previous theory, the values of individual autonomy and self-actualization come with the rejection of traditional social institutions (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995, 2002, Surkyn and Lesthaeghe 2004). As traditional institutions cannot justifiably be allowed to constrain autonomy they are eroded by means such as political policy reforms (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002) and risk-diminishing behavioral strategies (Beck 1992, Bauman 2003). The question, then, is how the marriage can be understood as an institution that is not constraining autonomy. This was achieved in the participants discourse through entirely disembedding the marriage from its historical context of institutions, and by disembedding it from explicit connections to factors understood as threatening to individualized values (see figure 5).
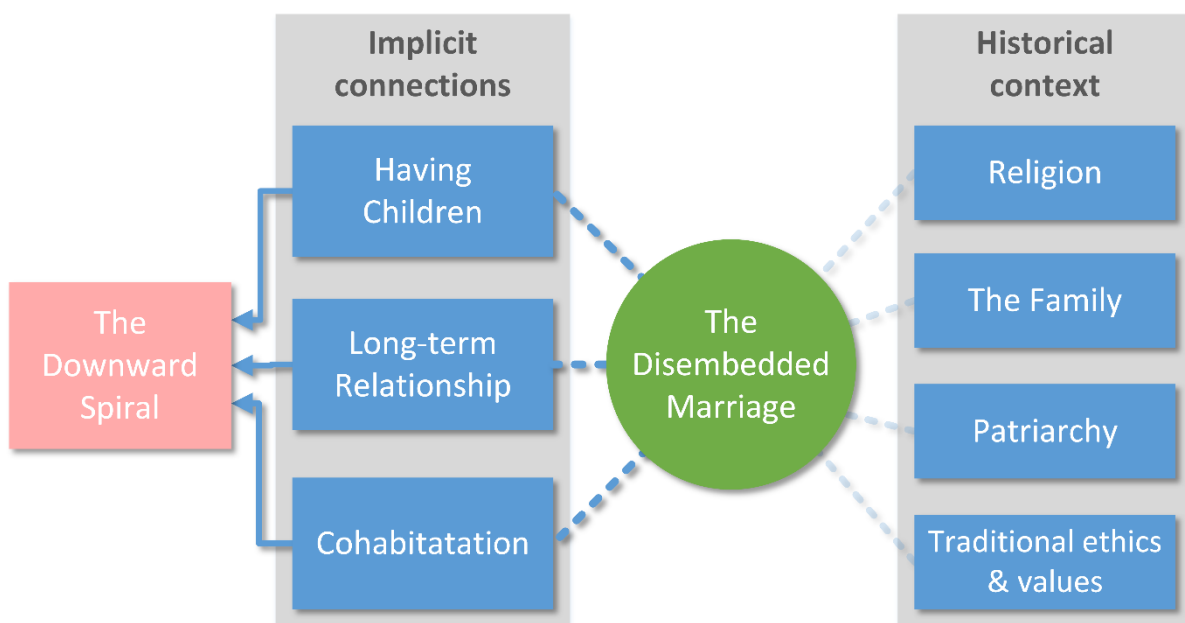

Figure 5. Discourse model of the double disembedment of the marriage.

The contemporary Swedish marriage was defined by comparisons against other eras and cultures as the end product of a progressive de-traditionalization process leading towards increasing individual freedom from institutions. This disembedding discourse constructed the Swedish marriage as a merely formal or symbolic institution, which by itself was causally impotent; unable to influence and change individuals or relationships.

However, the participants also shared an implicit understanding of marriages as potentially constraining to autonomy and limiting self-actualization. However, this understanding was not directly tied to the marriage institution itself, but was implied or presumed when talked about relationship problems in general. Whether asked or spontaneously discussing them, the participants did not talk about specific marital problems but general relationship problems, which may or may not be more prominent in marriages. In a well-established cross-group discourse, relationship problems were understood as consequences of a dynamic inherent in all couple relationships, and thus the marriage itself could not be blamed. This dynamic was described as a downward spiral process that escalates over time and unavoidably leads to losing the initial emotional excitement in a romantic relationship. This downward spiral was fueled by a lack of time and effort 'for each other', to nourish the relationship, and children were understood to act as catalysts to this process.

The downward spiral process risked the development into a bad relationship if the individuals involved did not actively intervene by doing sufficient relationship work (See figure 6 on the next page). The 'bad relationship' concept was used by the participants as a discursive container for all possible relationship risks, enclosing them all at once in a single construct. In a similar way as in the study of self-help TV-shows by Eldén (2012), the bad relationship was understood as the consequence of insufficient or failed relationship work. The downward spiral could consequently be resisted, or even temporarily reversed, by investing enough effort and time, a logic that puts the control and responsibility of the outcome in the hands of individuals. This attribution of causality is yet another means by which the marriage institution is de-problematized. By attributing causality to the actions of specific individuals, risks can be dismissed as controllable and avoidable; as something that only happens in bad relationships, with the wrong person and/or with insufficient relationship work.

In conclusion, I argue that an individualized organization of discourse de-problematizes the contemporary Swedish marriage to such a degree that it is cannot be understood as a threat to the individualized values identified by Surkyn and Lesthaeghe (2004).

1. All relationships, especially those with children, become difficult to keep exciting

Children as catalyst

The relationship becomes **routinized** and **time passes**

Insufficient time spent together & taking each other for granted

Feelings of excitement lost

The downward spiral

Relationship work

2. This process can be avoided by doing the necessary 'relationship work'

Successful 'work'

Insufficient 'work'

Resisting the spiral, Growing together, Supporting each other

The bad relationship

Autonomy & Self-actualization constrained

Cheating

3. While problems may be common, they are only a part of the 'bad relationship' caused by insufficient 'work'
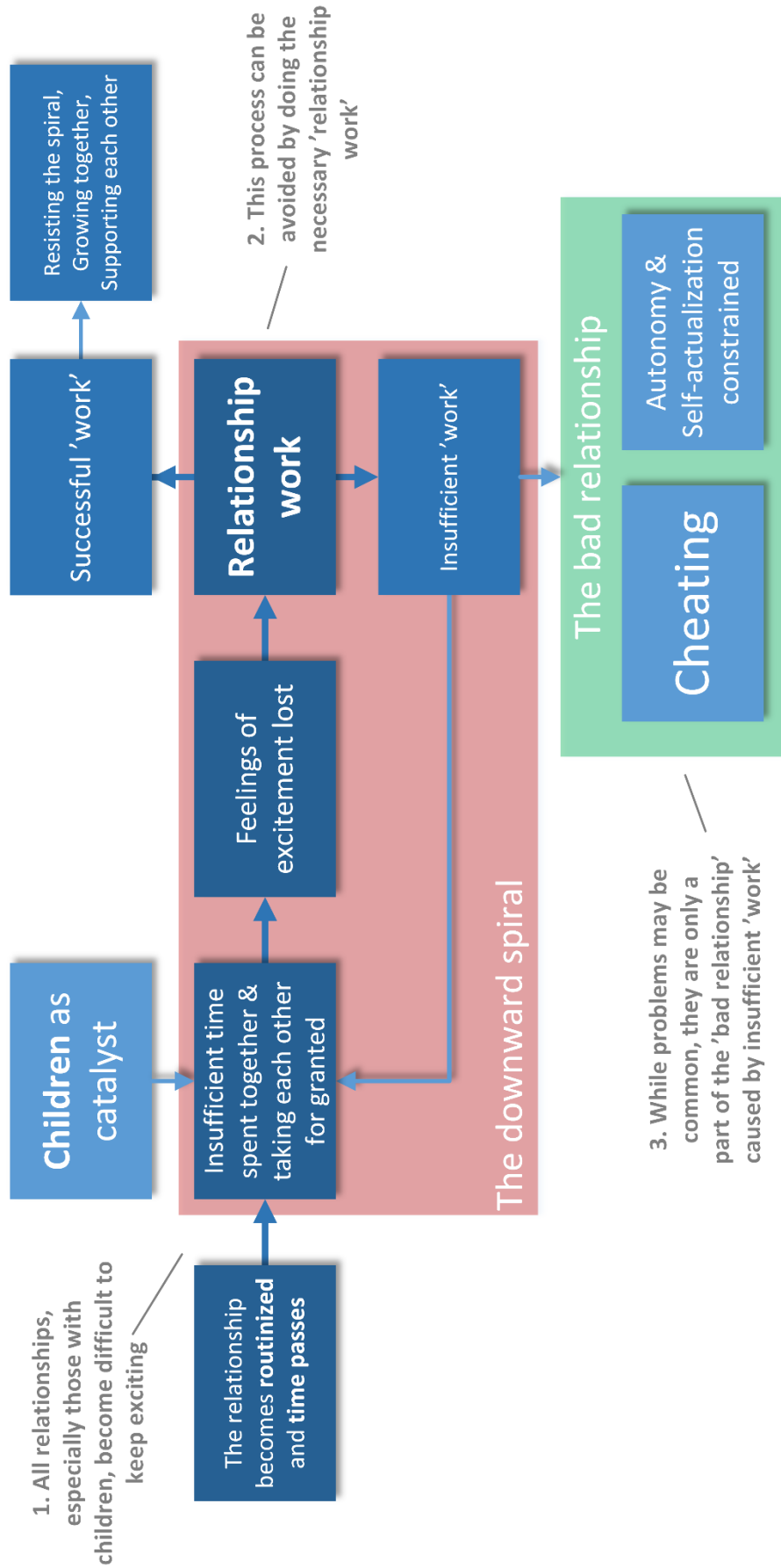
Figure 6. Discourse model mapping the logic of the downward spiral.

5.2. Discussion

This thesis proposes a way to close the theoretical gap brought to attention by Ohlsson-Wijk (2011), by expanding upon the conclusions of Eldén (2012) and applying a discourse theoretical framework. I have shown through empirical analysis that what may have appeared to be paradoxical when looking only at marriage rates and value surveys is in fact a consequence of an insufficient theoretical understanding of individualization. The conclusions of this analysis highlights the importance of considering ideational individualization a mode of discursive organization, rather than as simply a set of values. Individualization should not be understood as a one-directional erosive process, but as a complex of multiple heterogeneous and contradictory processes without a common terminus in which individualization could be said to be 'complete.' In line with Eldén's (2012) critique of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995, 2002), I argue that individualization does not simply destroy traditional discourse, but reorganizes it around the individual.

The fact that the majority of all children in Sweden are since 1990 born outside of marriage (see figure 1, p. 2), suggests that the role of marriage as the foundation of the family has changed considerably[15]. Shortly after the reverse of marriage rates in 1998 a commitment motive, rather than family formation, was reported by young Swedish adults to be the primary reason to marry (Bernhardt 2001). Based on the analysis in this thesis, I argue that the primary role of the marriage in contemporary Sweden to young adults may be to cement the couple itself. The marriage is thus related to the relationship between two adults, and fills an auxiliary rather than central function to the family. In this discourse the marriage strengthens the bond between two individuals; creating a more definitive and durable 'us.' Understood this way, marriage in a highly individualized society appears to be meaningful not simply in spite of, but also because of, individualization—more precisely because of its ability to counteract some of the centripetal forces of high individualization.

This is, however, not to claim that individualized discourse alone caused the Swedish marriage rates to turn upwards in 1998. The conclusions and claims of this analysis only stretches as far as to show that this discursive organization can make the marriage viable in spite of the highly individualized values. While individualized values did likely conflict with the marriage institution during the Swedish SDT, as Surkyn and Lesthaeghe (2004, Lesthaeghe 2010) claim, but these values are currently not in conflict with the Swedish marriage as

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[15] This can be compared to just over 10% of all Swedish children being born outside of marriage in 1960.

understood by the young adults in this study. What once might have been understood as threatening is now discursively attributed to relationships themselves, and perhaps understood as facilitated by cohabitation and family formation. The disembedding of the marriage, and the empowerment of Swedish cohabitation, has shifted a large part of the previous legal and symbolic functions of marriage to cohabitation. Perhaps Swedish cohabitation should not be understood as a 'trial marriage' as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim suggests (1995), but as a semi- or "almost-marriage", just lacking that final definite cementing that the marriage accomplishes. These conclusions suggests that the marriage is itself is not the most prominent sociological problem when it comes to individualization close relationships. Rather, it may be cohabitation and having children—organizing families and households based on kinship and/or romantic partnership—that require explanation in the face of individualization.

5.2.1. Validity and limitations

Three factors support the validity of making analytical generalizations based on the conclusions of the analysis in this thesis. First, the four validation criteria listed in section 3.1 are well accounted for. Secondly, empirical saturation was reached by group three, in which nothing new was added to the dominant discourses in the previous groups. A strong and invariable cross-group correspondence, and in-group agreement, suggests that the mapped discourses are well established. Finally, the marriage discourse used by these young adults match the discourse of the Swedish marriage law (Äktenskapsbalk, 1987:230), which is an entirely different context. The formulations of the law construct the marriage in the same way as participants did; as disembedded and individualized, entirely gender neutral and secularized. Like the participants' discourse, the law has one exception to this disembedding—the unexplained presumption that marriage has something to do with children. This indicates that this discursive regime is highly intertextual, and its use in the formulations of a law suggest significant discursive power.

While discourses cannot be limited to an empirical sample, they can nonetheless be limited by the sample as it constitutes a certain discursive context. While these discourses may be well established in some contexts, one must consider to what extent theoretical generalizations are justified. For example, it is not clear to what degree the analysis apply to less urbanized areas, or less educated population groups. If these discourses are as well established as they seem, a significant overlap can be expected but it is difficult to convincingly estimate how the discourses may differ. I would not extend my claims beyond the age group or beyond Sweden as I cannot know what role age plays, and the individualized Swedish laws and welfare policy appears to play an important role in the Swedish discourse on marriage. One may also ask how

gender relates to these conclusions, but men and women must necessarily share some fundamental ways of understanding relationships, which the cross-group and in-group correspondence also indicates[16]. Gender differences may be a matter of attitudes, opinions and behaviors.

A limitation of the study is its case study design. While it accomplishes the objective—and analyticist conclusions do not gain anything from comparison *per se* (Jackson 2010)—a comparative design would still have been able to make additional claims. An international comparison of marriage discourse would say more of what is unique to Swedish discourse, and of how different discursive organization may be related to different values and practices. A longitudinal comparative study could have made claims on how the discourse of marriage has changed over time by using material such as legal reform documents, or the course of public debate in national media. Another limitation could be said to be the size of the study. I do, however, believe that this limitation was somewhat offset by the nature of the subject matter, normative discourse, which by virtue of being widespread and well established seemed to have enabled early empirical saturation.

5.2.2. Recommendations for further studies

If cohabitation has indeed taken over much of the previous role of marriage, but is still not as definitive as marriage, further study of Swedish cohabitation is warranted. Such research should cover cohabitation as a practice and as a discursive unit, in particular in relation to risk negotiation and flexibility. This could raise questions of why people organize households around romantic relationships even in highly individualized Sweden. When and why do young adults move in together, and what is considered when they do? Is it the 'last day of freedom', and what is the relation to individualized values such as autonomy and self-realization? How is cohabitation institutionalized?

In Sweden, cohabitation with friends rather than a romantic partner appears to be a considerable alternative to young adults, but research on this is still limited. This is particularly interesting if compared to living together with a romantic partner in regards to individualized values, flexibility and risk negotiation. How are boundaries, rules and privacy handled? Is this type of cohabitation in some way considered a unit of belonging to identify with? How do interpersonal relationships develop during cohabiting? Can this sometimes be a preferable way of living to other constellations such as the family and/or the romantic couple?

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[16] Group one consisted mostly of males and group two of only females.

Finally, as theoretically suggested, other institutions than gender and the marriage, which were previously eroded by individualization, may now also be kept implicit, maintained and reproduced, due to a highly individualized organization of discourse. This raises questions of to which extent individualized discourse supports the implicit reproduction of institutions such as for example sexual essentialism and structural racism.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A: Concepts and Definitions

Attribution of causation: The site, object or agent in narratives or presumptions, that is understood as the cause of some consequence is being attributed causation..

Boundary work: Defining a discursive entity through negations in relation to other entities - defining something by what it is not. Sometimes also called 'border work.'

Cementing: An organizational function making the bond between two individuals stronger, more definite, durable and long-term, see section 4.1.3.

Discourse: Logic of cognition and/or culture; the structure of all kinds of knowledge and meaning. May be conscious or unconscious, explicit or implicit, articulable or tacit.

Discursive field: The discursive space of a cognitive entity in which various discourses compete to define themselves as the objective logic of the cognitive entity.

Discursive regime: A set of interrelated discourses in a discursive field, which supports and legitimizes each other, rather than opposes and competes.

(Discursive) Disembedding: Removing a discourse or institution from its immediate context, stripping it of previous power-relations.

Explicit discourse: Discourse articulated or articulable through language acts such as speech and text.

Implicit discourse: Pre-requisites and presumptions necessary for articulated discourse to be intelligible. Also includes social practices, tacit and unconscious cognition.

Individualization: Processes with the common consequence of leading toward a social organization centered on the individual.

Individualized discourse: Discourse organized around the individual.

Internal reference: Individualized discursive organization in which causation and/or ethical justification refers to internal states or forces of individuals, such as personality and the free will.

Normative discourse: Well-established discourse that constructs the normal (i.e. norms).

Relationship work: The continuous investment of effort into a relationship necessary to keep it from becoming a 'bad relationship.'

The 'bad relationship': A type of relationship in which the downward spiral has escalated out of control. The bad relationship contains the potential risks of relationships, such the risk of cheating, or constrained autonomy and self-actualization.

The 'downward spiral': A process identified by the participants as inherent in all relationship dynamics; the cause of the 'bad relationship' if not actively resisted through 'relationship work.' Facilitated in intensity by having children. See section 4.2.2.

The second demographic transition [the SDT]: Conceptualization of demographic patterns observed mainly in western nations, characterized by decreasing marriage and birth rates and increasing divorce rates, initiated in Nordic nations by the 1960's.

Validity: The quality of legitimate and valuable scientific knowledge and its production(see section 3.1.1 for further details).

Appendix B: Transcript Legend Chart

[text]   Brackets indicate a modified quotation.

[Text]   Bold brackets are used to insert comments and notes of behaviors.

[...]   Bold bracketed ellipses marks that one or several articulations, or parts of an articulation, have been excluded.

–   An en dash marks an interruption in an articulation, either as a pause made by the speaker in a statement, or at the end of a statement if the articulation has been interrupted by the following speaker. Following an interruption, if the next articulation from the original speaker begins with an en dash, the original speaker has continued to speak simultaneously with the interrupter.

. . .   An ellipsis indicate an unfinished articulation or a longer interruption in a statement from a single speaker.

i   Italics are used to mark something of particular analytical interest.

b   A bold font demarcate what is not a part of the participants' articulations.

u   Underlining of text marks modalizations of analytical interest.

Appendix C: Session Guide Notes 1

Introduktion

Vem är jag
– Jacob Strandell, Fil mag sociologi, lunds universitet

Vad är detta

– **Masteruppsats om hur unga vuxna tänker kring parrelationer och äktenskap.**

Hur kommer det att gå till?

– **Inspelning, transkribering, anonymisering, konfidentialitet.**

– **Småprat**, **ej formell intervju**, jag modererar diskussionen och är intresserad av **öppna svar, funderingar, åsikter osv.**

– Be om **en introduktionsrunda**. **Namn, er relation till varandra, vad ni studerar, har ni någon relation just nu?** Säg så mycket eller lite av detta som ni själva är bekväma med.

Inledande diskussionsämnen

– Vad tänker ni när jag säger äktenskap? **Vad är äktenskap**?
– Har ni någonsin funderat på om ni kommer att gifta er i framtiden?
– **Varför gifter man sig?**
– Vilka **problem** eller hinder kan äktenskap innebära?
– Kan ni beskriva **hur ett bra/dåligt äktenskap kan vara?**
– **Vem gifter sig?** Är somliga mer benägna än andra? Vilka? **När** gifter man sig?

Frågor för teoretisk mättnad

– Har äktenskap någonting med **religion** att göra? Varför?
– Vad tycker ni om **samkönade äktenskap**? Varför?
– Vad har äktenskap för relation till **kärlek**?
– Vad har äktenskap för relation till **familjen**?

Äktenskap och mediadiskurs

– Det är ganska **vanligt att äktenskap problematiseras i t.ex. filmer och TV-serier** (ex. American Beauty, Blue Valentine, Mad Men…). Hur förhåller det här sig till verkligheten tror ni?
– Ett vanligt tema är **otrohet**. Hur vanligt tror ni att otrohet är i äktenskap? Varför händer det och vem händer det?
– Ett annat tema är **tristess** i äktenskapet, eller att man växer isär. Varför tror ni att det händer? Är det oundvikligt? Vem händer det?

Tack! (Ge ut mailadress om någon är intresserad)

Appendix D: Session Guide Notes 2

Vem är jag
– Jacob Strandell, Fil mag sociologi, lunds universitet

Vad är detta
– **Masteruppsats om hur unga vuxna tänker kring samtida parrelationer och äktenskap.**

Hur kommer det att gå till?
– **Inspelning, transkribering, anonymisering, konfidentialitet.**
– **Småprat**, **ej formell intervju**, jag modererar diskussionen och är intresserad av **öppna svar, funderingar, åsikter osv.**

– Be om **en introduktionsrunda**. **Namn, er relation till varandra, vad ni studerar, har ni någon par-relation just nu?** Säg så mycket eller lite av detta som ni själva är bekväma med.

– Användbart diskussionsämne: Mellan 1970 och 2007 så sjönk andelen giftemål i EU med 38% och skiljsmässa blev dubbelt så vanligt. Sedan 1980 så föds fler och fler barn utanför äktenskap och barnahavande skjuts fram till efter 30.

Diskussionsämnen:
– Alla **sociala institutioner förändras** över tid. Hur skulle ni beskriva äktenskapets förändringar?
– Fråga om folk har sett **Mad men, blue valentine, american beauty?** Skulle ni säga att det här är socialrealism? Varför?; diskutera **vilka problem som förekommer** i den och sedan varför det är/blir så. T.ex. Mad men?
– Det är **tre ggr vanligare att otrohet är ett tema** i film och tv-serier, varför är det så?
– Visa **Metro-artikeln om 40-plusmammor**, be om kommentarer, tankar, åsikter? Varför är det så?
– Visa **Happy Happy**, kanske nämna kort om vad den handlar om—vad tror ni om det här, varför skriver man en sån bok och hur tror ni att människor upplever den? Är det bra eller dåligt?
– förväntningar/plikter?

– Varför gifter sig människor idag tror ni?
– Sambo—varför det ena eller det andra?
– Hur ser äktenskapets framtid ut tror ni?

– Vad tänker ni när jag säger äktenskap? **Vad är äktenskap**?

Tack! (Ge ut mailadress om någon är intresserad)
Debreif, vad tyckte ni?

Appendix E: Original Swedish Transcription Excerpts

4.1.1.

A2: Jag tänker att det är något rent ekonomiskt praktiskt–

MODERATOR: Jasså?

A2: –så när folk skaffar barn så tycker dom att det är praktiskt att gifta sig. Jag vet inte varför.

B2: Slippa diskutera om vad barnen ska få för efternamn kanske.

A2: Jaa.

B2: –då är det redan är bestämt på nått sätt, så att barnens framtid är liksom säkrad, i och med att man ingår i äktenskapslagen - fast det är klart det finns ju sambo . . .

Någon: Ja

C2: Fast det tänker jag också att det ger fördelar när man ska ta banklån och så . . .

Någon: mm.

MODERATOR: Eh, när ni säger praktiska saker, vad tänker ni på då?

[. . .]

A2: Efternamnet.

MODERATOR: Efternamn.

D2: Och sen om nån går bort.

Någon: mm

D2: Alltså arvet.

MODERATOR: Arv, ja okej.

D2: Det blir att det tillfaller den man är gift med väl?

C3: Men alltså just det här med– också att vi blir mer och mer materialistiska och– coh– kapitalistiska får man väl säga. Alltså det här med ägande, och ägandeformer, alltså det är ju så stor skillnad i äktenskap och– sambo. Alltså även om man lever identiska liv så har man ju stora juridiska skillnader. Så därför så tror jag att äktenskapet kommer att hänga kvar för att . . .

B3: Väljer man att gifta sig så går man in i den juridiska, då har man valt, alltså, dom reglerna.

A3: Jag vet inte ens vad det är för juridiska . . .

C3: Jo, men om den ena, om någon, går bort eller så–

A3: mm

4.1.2

A1: För mig är det nog mer informellt än vad du säger, värdet är mer att– att, två personer beslutar att dom vill leva tillsammans. Eh, och att giftermålet är liksom– visar att– eh– att det visar för varandra att det är så här man vill ha det. Man vill inte vara med någon annan. Mer än det mer formella, det lagliga. Det– spelar nog inte så stor roll. För mig.

[. . .]

A1: Då blir det kanske lite mer definitivt–

E1: Ja.

A1: –än bara sambo och–

E1: Ja– ja kanske.

E1: Det är [. . .] en seger i förhållandet, det visar att, det visar världen och sig själv . . .

C1: Jag tror också när, alltså inte lika mycket men ändå att, eh, bröloppet kan spela in, att man vill uppleva det–

A1: mm.

C1: –att det är så stort i vårt samhälle, att det är liksom en stor cermoni, att bjuda in vänner och bekanta och visa upp sig lite och– lite allt möjligt.

A1: Fast man visar väl upp typ nånstans– jag är inne på kärleken hela tiden! [några skrattar] Man visar väl upp kärleken–

MODERATOR: Vad är kärlekens roll i äktenskap?

B2: Men det är väl för att bevisa för sig själva och för andra att, att man plötsligt har bestämt sig för att nu är det vi och, mm . . . Det blir tydligt genom . . .

MODERATOR: Så det är lite för att markera och . . . kanske visa upp?

[Medhåll från minst tre håll i form av "mm"]

A3: Ja, ja men typ, ja men alltså, att det är en fin fest, att visa kärleken, och kanske visa, visa för andra att vi hör ihop eller liksom . . .

C3: mm.

B3: precis.

A3: –bytt efternamn, och ha en ring på fingret, det är lite så här– ja men, tillhör, tillhör någon.

B3: ja, ja det är det nog.

B2: Det kanske kan bli mer en förändring i hur andra ser på ett förhållande, jag tror inte att det blir någon förändring inom förhållandet, utifrån sett, jag menar jag kan ju se annorlunda på ett par som har gift sig jämfört med par som inte har gift sig–

Någon: mm.

B2: –att då blir det verkligen; okej– ni–

A2: [bryter skämtsamt in] He's off the market, eller?

[många skrattar]

[. . .]

C2: Jag tänker om det är någon som är svartsjuk eller så, så kanske det blir ett bevis för den andra, att nu visar jag för honom eller henne att jag, eh, att det inte är nånting att vara svartsjuk över eller så där liksom–

A2: mm.

C2: –men personliga egenskaper försvinner ju inte bara för att man har ringar på fingret.

4.1.3

A2: . . . sen känns det väl också som vi sa att det är traditionellt och . . . ett naturligt steg, där man på nått sätt vill bindas ihop med nån annan person. Mer än bara ett samboskap.

[. . .]

A2: Det är som att man har stabiliserat förhållandet och liksom förberett sig på att, ja, ta ytterligare nästa steg.

[medhåll från flera]

A1: Man beslutar sig att man vill leva tillsammans med en person.

MODERATOR: Ja.

B1: För mig är det mycket det, det formella, liksom, alltså, det rent typ– att göra sitt förhållande till ett formellt lagstadgat förhållande på något sätt liksom [småskratt], som erkänns av, ja. Man blir liksom på något sätt ett hushåll, mer än om man bara följer sambolagen eller vad man ska säga.

Någon: mm.

C1: Två människor som lever tillsammans i ett ganska integrerat liv–

MODERATOR: mm.

C1: –gör mycket saker tillsammans, går man på fest så gör man det tillsammans, och sånt där–

MODERATOR: Vad symboliserar äktenskap?

C1: Trohet

E1: commitment.

MODERATOR: till vad?

C1: eh, till en annan person.

MODERATOR: mm

B1: Det är väl en försäkran liksom. Eh, om att man kan lita på nånting.

A1: Men för mig är det nog lite att man lovat sina barn, eller framtida barn, att man ska vara tillsammans och att man ska ta hand om dom tillsammans. Att man inte ska ge upp utan ifall det blir jobbigt och skiljas.

A3: ja, sen tror jag det kanske många som känner så här att när vi väl är gifta - då är det vi, att dom ser det som en trygghet eller en säkerhet. Men sen är det ju inte så egentligen–

B3: ja

A3: det kan ju hända vad fan som helst ändå liksom, men–

B3: aa

A3: ja, det–

MODERATOR: mm?

C3: Det är lite knepigare att gå igenom äktenskapsskillnaderna–

A3: aa

C3: –än att bara flytta isär.

B3: Ja, precis.

A2: Mm, och kanske det att om man var tveksam som par innan, "är det vi som ska leva ihop?", så kanske folk tänker att "Ja, gifter vi oss, då har vi båda bestämt oss", och då kan ingen få för sig att "nja det kan ändras", för att då kan båda två koppla bort det andra alternativet som är då att gå skillda vägar. Så att man kan gå in för förhållandet mer för att då har man beslutat det.

B2: Det är lättare att göra slut med någon man inte bor ihop med och när man bor ihop så blir det lite svårare, och när man är gift då blir det väldigt mycket mer, liksom steg att gå igenom för att bli av med den, eh [flera skrattar till], personen . . . Alltså att sära på sig. Det kan ju vara i positiv bemärkelseo ckså, att man kanske kämpar lite hårdare och löser dom problemen som finns.

4.1.4

MODERATOR: hänger barn och äktenskap ihop på något sätt?

B3: Nej

A3: nej

B3: Det tror jag absolut inte att det gör.

C3: Jag tror att för vissa av praktiska skäl, att om man får barn så blir det enklare.

A3: fast i och för sig, om man gifter sig så förväntas det nog att man ska skaffa barn–

B3: Ja, så kan det vara! I den ordningen kan det ju i och för sig vara.

A3: Men, det kräver ju inte att man gifter sig för att skaffa barn.

B3: Nej.

B3: Jo jag tänker liksom att idag kan man ju bli förälder om man är ensamstående, alltså– Man lever själv också, så jag tänker att– jag vet inte.

B1: Det blir ytterligare ett steg liksom, tänker jag. Alltså till, det är nån slags livslinje liksom. Asså att det, att barn hörn till liksom. Jag vet inte om giftermål kommer tidigare, innan, innan barnen. Jag tror att det är– rent så här, normativt liksom, att man . . .

E1: Det hänger ihop liksom, har man barn så ska man väl vara ihop resten av livet liksom. Gifter man sig så ska man också vara det.

[flera instämmer]

D2: Jag tror att det på nått sätt hänger samman . . .

B2: absolut

D2: . . . det kan ju vara åt det ena eller andra hållet. Som du sa att man gifter sig innan man skaffar barn, eller bara skaffar barn och så, så [skrattar till] gifter man sig för att man har skaffat barn.

MODERATOR: Om man gifter sig innan man skaffar barn, är det med tanke att få barn då eller är det bara . . .

A2: Ja det tror jag–

B2: ja

C & D2: mm

A2: ... att det är ett steg i det tror jag. Om man vill ha barn så är det ju det.

MODERATOR: Det hänger ihop på något sätt där?

A2: Om båda vill det, annars är det inte så.

B3: Typ så! Men också att då, då lägger jag nog lite, eller då tänker jag nog automatiskt att okej nu, nu har ni verkligen planer på att– inom väldigt kort framtid skaffa barn ... Alltså det är nog ganska mycket som läggs vid, Eller så, men jag gör nog lite den bedömningen att, att det finns vidare planer efter bröllopp, och då blir det så uppenbart att ni har liksom bestämt er för att nu kör ni på liksom.

[medhåll från flera deltagare]

A2: Ja men det känns ju lite som ett paket, om man nu vill det liksom ...

D2: mm

A2: ... det är som att det är ett steg. Först så gifter man sig och så skaffar man barn.

D2: Ja det ju mer sammanhängade åt det hållet tänker jag, att man först gifter sig och sen skaffar barn. Men det kan ju lika gärna vara att man först skaffar barn, det i sig indikerar ju inte att du kommer att gifta dig ...

[Medhåll från flera, inklusive mig]

A2: Fast i dagens läge känns det nästan vanligare ...

B2: Ja ...

A2: ... att skaffa barn först

B2: ... det håller jag med om. Ja, men det känns inte som att ...

A2: Det är ingen som tror att bara för att man skaffar barn så kommer man inte ...

B ... eller jag tänker inte på det så att ...

A2: ... att gifta sig

B2: ... nej men precis, men det är väl dock ett mål, som du säger. Jag tänker aldrig på det så, att det är åt det hållet. Att skaffar du barn så kommer du att gifta dig.

A2: mm

MODERATOR: Tror ni att det är vanligt att folk gifter sig utan några som helst planer på att skaffa barn eller familj i framtiden?

D2: Nej.

C2: Nej.

MODERATOR: Varför ...

A2: Nej på nått sätt är det diskuterat i förhållandet tror jag.

4.2.1

MODERATOR: Associerar ni äktenskap till religion på något sätt?

B3: Nej. Inte sådär.

C3: Jag kan faktiskt bli lite irriterad när folk tvunget ska gifta sig i kyrkan även om dom inte är kristna.

MODERATOR: mhm?

C3: Jag tycker att det är povocerande. Samma också om man döper sina barn i kyrkan.

A3: mm

B3: Ja, jag skulle inte– Om jag nu skulle gifta mig, jag har absolut inga tankar på att jag ska gifta mig i kyrkan.

Alla: nej

B3: det är så onaturligt.

C3: Ja.

[Moderatorn gör en historisk koppling och möts av tystnad]

A2: [fårvånad] Du menar alltså i vanliga äktenskap?

MODERATOR: Mm. Här i sverige. Parrelation.

Någon: mm

C2: Men jag har inte tänkt så att . . .

Någon: nej

C2: [oljud] det utan det handalr väl mer om hur man själv väljer att dela upp, ja, du valde att göra det arbetet liksom, eller sådär hur man . . .

MODERATOR: Ja.

C2: . . . ja, hur man . . .

A2: Jämställdhets, typ, val

B2: mm

A2: Med föräldrarförsäkrning och sånt. Vem som stannar hemma med barn, om det blir några såna.

MODERATOR: mm

A2: Det, det bestämmer ju inte äktenskapet i sig.

C3: Jag vet inte, det kan vara snarare– Att "jag är jag, det spelar väl ingen roll om jag har det eller det efternamnet, om jag är gift med dig, det spelar ingen roll, eller så, jag är jag i alla fall".

B2: Och sen är det väl så att det är bara ett förhållande liksom.

A2: mm, precis. Det är inte nått som händer, det blir inte annorlunda efter att, att du har gift dig . . . så. För det är säkert en anledning kan jag tänka mig också att folk gifter sig– eh– som kanske har problem. Och tänker att det kan äktenskap kanske lösa. Eller att det typ som folk ibland skaffar barn för att "något behöver hända nu i förhållandet", då är också giftermålet en del i det att försöka, mm, att försöka utveckla förhållandet för att det kanske har kört fast.

Någon: mm

MODERATOR: Men tänker ni att folk förändras när folk gifter sig då? Eller gör ni inte det?

B2: Nej, inte rent det vardagliga så. Det gör det kanske inte.

D1: Men uhm, en jämställdhetsaspekt kanske kan spela en stor roll beroende på hur det ser ut i länder som kanske är liksom, om man säger, sverige har kommit ganska långt så finns det länder som kanske precis har börjat det riktigta jämställdhetsarbetet. Jag vet faktiskt inte hur spanien ligger itll där men jag kan tänka mig att det är lite så, och då blir det så här– Då kanske man inte har hunnit anpassa lagar och allting liksom, för och bli– och göra det så att det blir lagligt så jämställt som möjligt eller vad man ska säga.

B2: Idag accepteras det kanske mer med skilljsmässa och så och–

Någon: mm.

B2: . . . det kan ta slut och folk känner ju varandra mer idag när man gifter sig och [ohörligt]– Och jag kan tänka mig att, alltså, ja, det godkänns på ett annat sätt. Eller godkänns låter som fel ord men ja. Det kanske inte är en big deal liksom.

Någon: mmnej

B2: Förr var det ju mycket, eh, religion och så, så att . . . Man skiljde sig inte och det var inte accepterat.

C3: Nej men jag tänker lite så här rent tradtionellt, alltså– Ja men runt 40-talet och där, alltså, då gifte man sig ju, eller, då var det ju ett sätt att försörja sig för kvinnan, ju. Och– alltså, en norm och en regel, alltså–

[alla håller med]

B3: Ja, och skulle man ha barn så skulle man kanske vara gift också, alltså lite så kanske.

A3: Det känns mer, alltså, som ett krav

[medhåll från alla]

B3: Ja och sen så är det ju att man gick in i ett äketnskap och så var det ju verkligen liksom for life, oavsett vad man känner, eller lite kanske. Eh, och idag så är det väl mera, alltså, jag vet inte–

C3: Ombytligt

B3: –man är inte beroende av varandra på samma sätt. Alltså, man kan skilja sig för att "Jag har råd att försörja mig själv"

4.2.2

B3: Då var det mer så den dagen man flyttar ihop, ja, innan det så är det sista dagen i frihet, då borde det vara mer så–

C3: ja precis.

B3: Men sen tror jag, man pluggar längre, dels så här kanske efter skolan, efter gymnasiet, så kanske man reser några år och pluggar några år, och sen kanske man pluggar lite till, och jobbar några år, tar tiden att få det jobbet man vill ha, och då går tiden och då tänker man att– man nog ska jobba lite– och–

C3: Och sen tror jag också att man blir lite mera, alltså, lite mera ego.

B3: Ja.

C3: alltså det handlar inte om att– jag lever för eller genom mina barn.

B3: Nej.

C3: alltså min identitet är inte mina barn–

B3: Precis.

MODERATOR: mhm?

C3: –utan man är sig själv mycket mera, och då finns det inget behov av barn.

B3: nej.

A3: Och det finns så mycket mer möjligheter. Alltså, mina föräldrar, dom hade ju inte, det var ju inte så här bara "vi åker till australien" men både jag och syrran, vi bara, "ja men vi

bor där ett tag" och vi åkte etill australien. Det är så mycket mer tillgängligt. Världen är så mycket mer tillgänglig, och då blir det så här "jag vill göra det här först" för att man kan.

A2: Ja, jag är helt– passionen finns kvar, men spänningen, den överlever liksom inte i ett förhållande om du umgås med personen varje dag–

B2: Nej

A2: Passionen är en helt annan sak . . .

MODERATOR: mm, okej.

A2: . . . Men spänningen den– den som säger att den fortfarande har spänning i ett förhållande, den ljuger [flera skrattar].

MODERATOR: Okej.

A2: Sen kan den den kan vara i ett år, eller tre år–

B2: Min morsa smsade att det håller– eh, förälskelsen håller, eh, i ett år och åtta månader [flera skrattar]. Det var precis när jag och min kille hade varit det, så tack liksom [skrattar högt].

C3: Och avsaknad av passion och–

A3: Att hålla kärleken vid liv.

C3: Ja, att det är den stora utmaningen.

MODERATOR: att det, att det liksom. Den stora– vad menar du med den stora utmaningen?

C3: Nej men att hålla kärleken vid liv liksom.

MODERATOR: att det är ett vanligt problem eller att det är ett problem i alla relationer tror du?

C3: Jo men periodvis är det väl det. Alltså, jag menar, om man har varit gift i 25 kan det ju inte alltid ha vart superkul–

A3: nej

B3: Nej precis, allt kan ju inte vara bra, tänk så få rman barn och– Dom småbarnsåren måste ju vara jobbiga, det kan ju inte vara perfekt för förhållandet liksom, alltså man får väl jobba för att hålla kärleken vid liv liksom, fast att man nånstans förhoppningsvis har en grund i det liksom.

A3: Ja jag tror att kärleken blir liksom typ– spänningen, eller gnistan lite mer, som blir svårt, för grundkärleken finns ju där ändå. Typ att man– gör saker för varandra, och visar uppskattning, och så här– inte tar varandra för givet.

A2: . . . att man kanske är ännu säkrare på "nu är vi" och då– kanske det riskerar att– göra så att, ja, så att den där kämparglöden finns inte längre [småskratt] för då, då har man varandra liksom så att . . .

B2: mm

A2: . . . det blir kanske ännu mer att man tar varandra för givet.

MODERATOR: mm. Hänger det ihop lite med den där spnningsaspekten kanske? Eller tristess?

D2: Ja då förstärks ju det att om man– eh– liksom, ja. om man tar varandra för givet på det sättet så slutar man ju kämpa som du säger och då blir det liksom en ond spiral.

B2: mm ja.

A2: Det är svårt att komma ur.

MODERATOR: mm. okej– okej.

C1: Man gör ju ett löfte som, alltså att man för alltid ska älska och tycka om den här personen. Men hur, hur ska man veta vad man känner om– tio, femton, tjugo år. Alltså, man kan ju göra ett löfte, ja jag tycker jättejättemycket om dig nu och vill leva med dig. Men liskom att säga att man ska göra det för alltid– Det är lite konstigt. Man kan ju inte veta något sånt om framtiden.

A2: Ja, jag är helt– passionen finns kvar, men spänningen, den överlever liksom inte i ett förhållande om du umgås med personen varje dag . . .

B2: Nej.

A2: Passionen är en helt annan sak.

MODERATOR: mm, okej.

A2: –Men spänningen den– den som säger att den fortfarande har spänning i ett förhållande, den ljuger [flera skrattar].

MODERATOR: Okej.

A2: Sen kan den kan vara i ett år, eller tre år–

B2: Min morsa smsade att det håller– eh, förälskelsen håller, eh, i ett år och åtta månader [flera skrattar]. Det var precis när jag och min kille hade varit det, så tack liksom [skrattar högt].

C3: Och avsaknad av passion och–

A3: Att hålla kärleken vid liv.

C3: Ja, att det är den stora utmaningen.

MODERATOR: att det, att det liksom. Den stora– vad menar du med den stora utmaningen?

C3: Nej men att hålla kärleken vid liv liksom.

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C3: Jo men periodvis är det väl det. Alltså, jag menar, om man har varit gift i 25 kan det ju inte alltid ha vart superkul–

A3: nej

B3: Nej precis, allt kan ju inte vara bra, tänk så få rman barn och– Dom småbarnsåren måste ju vara jobbiga, det kan ju inte vara perfekt för förhållandet liksom, alltså man får väl jobba för att hålla kärleken vid liv liksom, fast att man nånstans förhoppningsvis har en grund i det liksom.

A3: Ja jag tror att kärleken blir liksom typ– spänningen, eller gnistan lite mer, som blir svårt, för grundkärleken finns ju där ändå. Typ att man– gör saker för varandra, och visar uppskattning, och så här– inte tar varandra för givet.

A2: Att man kanske är ännu säkrare på "nu är vi" och då– kanske det riskerar att– göra så att, ja, så att den där kämparglöden finns inte längre [småskratt] för då, då har man varandra liksom så att–

B2: mm

A2: –det blir kanske ännu mer att man tar varandra för givet.

MODERATOR: mm. Hänger det ihop lite med den där spnningsaspekten kanske? Eller tristess?

D2: Ja då förstärks ju det att om man– eh– liksom, ja. om man tar varandra för givet på det sättet så slutar man ju kämpa som du säger och då blir det liksom en ond spiral.

B2: mm ja.

A2: Det är svårt att komma ur.

A2: För lite, eh, samliv liksom, för lite umgänge med– ensamma, när parets barn tar upp för mycket tid. Pappan vänder sig åt sitt håll och mamman går in i barnet.

MODERATOR: Och varför blir det så?

A2: Ja, att det, det är lätt att barnen tar över, man glömmer bort sin partner, det blir lätt vardagsrutiner som är svåra att bryta.

MODERATOR: Mm

B2: För lite tid till att vårda relationen.

A2: Tid ja, precis.

[. . .]

A2: Och sen att spänningen oftast försvinner efter ett tag . . .

B2: mm

A2: . . . Som man då kan återfå med tid för varran.

[. . .]

A2: [Förlusten av spänning pga rutiner] är helt omöjligt att undgå.

MODERATOR: är det det?

A2: Ja det tror jag, absolut. Sen gäller det väl att man värdesätter dom små tingen och– vad som– alltså, vad man tycker är mysigt med den andra personen.

B2: mm.

A2: Det behöver absolut inte röra sig om romantiska middagar och resor utan jag tänker bara musik, promenad, eller att man tar tid för varrandra tror jag är hela nycken till ett bra förhållande, om det så är äktenskap eller–

D2: Det är lättare– eller jag tänker att det är vanligare bland par som är gifta att nån är otrogen, än par som inte är gifta–

MODERATOR: Ja?

D2: –Men det väl också för att dom flesta som är gifta har kanske varit ihop längre än par som inte har gift sig och då kanske det är vanligare då, jag vet inte.

A3: Alltså, jag tänker att en del kanske gör det för spänning, för att dom är lite uttråkade. Man vill ha lite spänning.

A3: Sen tror jag att det kanske är nått som inte stämmer i förhållandet. Det är säkert många förhållanden som inte är bra, och folk kanske bara går och gör inget åt det, och så blir det– och så händer något sånt. Någon kanske blir kär i någon annan och vågar inte göra slut, alltså– om man har varit i relationen länge och har barn liksom.

MODERATOR: mm

A3: Mycket sånt tror jag att det kan vara.

B3:Man vill inte att det man har ska sabbas egentligen.

A3: Nej, att folk är rädda tror jag att det har jättemycket med att göra. Rädda för att så här– kanske förrändra sin situation, eh, eller, ja kanske rädda för att bli sårad själva. Om det är nåon som gör det för spänning eller så, så tror jag att man kanske har en rädsla för att– binda sig, eller att själv bli sårad.

C3: mm

D2: Alltså, när man själv är i ett förhållande så tänker man ju så, som jag nu som inte är i ett förhållande så tänker jag ju att det lika gärna skulle kunna hända mig. Men det är klart, när jag träffar en kille som jag litar på så tror jag ju inte det . . .

A3: Ja men som det står på boken, att det inte ska vara skuld. Det är ju verkligen hemskt att det ska vara skam och skuld–

B3: ja.

A3: –att ha skiljt sig, alltså, bara, om det funkar inte liksom–

B3: Nej precis

A3: –det är väl klart att man ska leta efter nånting, eller, hitta nånting bättre. Sen behöver man inte hitta något bättre i en annan partner, det kan ju bara vara ett bättre liv liksom.

C3: mm

B3: Men jag tror samhällets syn på skilljsmässa är att det är skuld, alltså–

C3: Eller det här misslyckandet tror jag att man känner

A3: ja–

C3: Det är väl också–