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Love exists as an object of fascination in Western culture, not only in romance novels, magazine columns, film and television but also in scholarship on personal life. However, despite increasing divorce rates and suggestions that modern dating is reminiscent of an 'apocalypse' (Sales, 2015), falling out of love remains an unspoken topic in the discourse surrounding love. Eloquently stated by Eva Illouz, a 'culture that has so much to say about love is far more silent on the no-less-mysterious moment when we avoid falling in love [and] where we fall out of love' (p.3). Ergo, in *The End of Love*, Illouz addresses this relatively ignored area of inquiry and provides a valuable contribution to our understanding of 'unloving' (p.4).

Eva Illouz is a remarkable scholar in the field of intimacy and consumption. Throughout her impressive career, she has made a significant contribution to sociological thought on the impact of capitalist culture in the realm of personal life. As Illouz's earlier publications have proposed (Illouz, 2007, 2012), modern love is characteristic of a capitalist consumer culture that favours bureaucratic rationality in pursuit of self-interest. Congruous with this, virtues of individualism, freedom and choice, with the intent to prioritise the self, become integral in our decision to love, how and who to love. Hence, developing this interpretation of modern love in *The End of Love*, Illouz details how the rational and consumerist logic that constitutes a relationship is equally present in its deconstruction.

Illouz's research is modelled on an 'ethnography of contemporary heterosexuality' (p.15), based on interviews with mostly heterosexual men and women and excerpts from romance novels, news articles and vignettes. Clearly, by virtue of its methodological design, *The End of Love* is limited to a heterosexual demographic. However, Illouz justifies the choice to recruit a predominantly heterosexual sample in her explanation of the research as 'focused on gender differences, which more often than not function as gender inequalities' (p.14). While suitable for discussing themes embedded in gender inequalities, it can be argued that without a discussion on how such themes transpire in same-sex relationships, it remains uncertain whether themes are exclusively related to heterosexual love. Thus, it would be of interest for research to explore how themes raised in *The End of Love*, which may not be explicitly characterised by gender inequalities, such as the ambiguity surrounding 'situationships' (p.153) and casual sex, may not be symptomatic of heterosexuality but may instead constitute modern love, and unloving, for all sexualities.

Illouz contextualises her approach to love by mapping how love became detached from religious cosmology and Church authority, with a shift towards individualism which transformed love into an object of choice and a commodity to satisfy self-interest. During this transition, Illouz argues, love was liberated from ritualised courtship which relied on 'a clear set of rules that organised emotions and interactions' (p.35) and, as a result, became profoundly ambiguous. While the transition towards individualisation broke love from the confines of 'religious patriarchy, gender inequalities, the equation of sex with sinfulness'

(p.45), homophobia and heteronormativity, new constraints emerged that entrenched love in deep uncertainty. As such, while freedom afforded choice in how and who to love, it also afforded the choice to avoid love and to fall out of love. In this way, Illouz argues, choice can be exercised both positively, through the want and desire for love, and negatively, in the avoidance and rejection of love. Thus, unlike pre-modern courtship, modern relationships can no longer be contractualised nor grounded in the certainty that love will last, leaving one feeling confused and lacking trust and ontological security.

The overarching concept that emerges from *The End of Love* is the notion of 'unloving' (p.4). Unloving, for Illouz, refers to the 'negative choice' (p.17) where an individual chooses not to love. Illouz's interpretation of unloving is dichotomous because 'unloving' can be established either by avoiding love or undoing it. In this way, 'un-' applies to the unravelling of a relationship and to the inability to form a relationship. More simply put, 'one form of unloving precedes loving (e.g. the one-night stand) and another follows it (the divorce)' (p.25). Illouz thus reflects on the duality of "unloving" in her detailed analysis of how the ability to form 'negative bonds' and make a 'negative choice' (p.21) is facilitated by a consumer-capitalist logic that prioritises choice, freedom and self-prioritisation.

Negative bonds, Illouz suggests, characterise relationships that are 'short lived, with little involvement of the self and [are] devoid of emotion' (p.21). Accordingly, the casual sexual relationship is the most salient example of a 'negative bond', by virtue of its short-lived and pleasure-centred nature, with no ulterior motive beyond its own experience. In contrast to the 'narrative linearity' of traditional heterosexual relationships (p.69), which progress in a series of milestones towards a specific goal, the casual sexual relationship is a singular episode and 'any expectations of intimacy, commitment and responsibility are restricted to the encounter' (p.65). As partners are often strangers to one another and engage in sex for their satisfaction, without emotional attachment nor expectation of commitment, casual sex thus becomes comparable to a service transaction where partners become objects to be evaluated, consumed and replaced. This is further accelerated, Illouz argues, by dating apps such as Tinder, allowing individuals to compare potential partners and evaluate their worth based on attraction, thus transforming partners into objects devoid of self. Illouz remains critical of dating apps, suggesting that technological developments, along with individualisation and consumerism, create conditions for negative bonds. However, it can be argued that this critical approach fails to consider those who use dating apps to establish a (positive) intimate bond. Challenging the idea that technology facilitates the dissolution of romantic love, [Hobbs et al. \(2016\)](#), in their study on the digital transformation of intimacy, found that 55% of respondents used dating apps to search for dates, while a comparatively small 25% used such apps to arrange sexual encounters. Hence, while technological developments enable individuals to arrange negative bonds and evaluate potential partners in a market of exchange, dating apps are not inherently linked to casual sex and remain a prevailing method to establish (positive) intimate bonds.

Illouz maintains a Feminist approach throughout *The End of Love*, and this is revealed particularly in her conclusive discussion of 'scopic capitalism', which refers to the 'exploitation of the sexual body through visual industries' (p.221). Illouz argues that scopic capitalism is grounded in gender inequalities which generate different forms of economic and social value for men and women, wherein 'women groom their bodies to produce value [...] while men consume women's production' (p.222). For Illouz, modern love under scopic capitalism is exploitative for women. Women's bodies become commodities purchased in a market of supply and demand, to be evaluated, consumed, disposed of and replaced when their value, and beauty, becomes obsolete. Illouz provides a fascinating and thought-provoking account of how women are exploited by scopic capitalism, which she draws upon in her discussion on new Internet technologies that have facilitated the visual evaluation of women. Specifically, Illouz refers to dating apps such as Tinder and the emergence of online sites (such as OnlyFans) where women market themselves and their bodies as 'commodities to be traded and auctioned' (p.107). However, while Illouz adopts a critical position in her discussion on women's exploitation, it can be argued that, like women, men are also subject to the same evaluation on dating apps. Their bodies, too, become commodities to be consumed. Indeed, this observation seeks not to trivialise women's exploitation nor suggest that exploitation is experienced equally by men and women. Instead, in making this observation, I intend to propose a nuanced suggestion that, perhaps, online technologies and their likeness to a marketplace are exploitative for all genders.

The End of Love raises a series of interesting concepts, though one of the most profound concepts, I believe, is the ambiguity surrounding negative bonds. In the traditional heterosexual relationship, which followed ritualistic courtship, sex was the ultimate milestone to indicate love and commitment. However, as sex has become the entry point of an intimate bond, it remains uncertain whether courtship will follow or whether the sexual encounter is a singular episode without further expectation of intimacy and commitment. Referring to Erving Goffman's *Frame Analysis* ([Goffman, 1974](#)), Illouz articulates that the 'frame' of a casual sexual encounter can become confused without clearly defined expectations, and parties may be uncertain whether the encounter is purely sexual or indicative of an emotional bond. The lack of scripted rules and shared frame of meaning thus contribute to the relative normlessness of negative bonds, whereby norms cannot be objectively defined but must be reflexively negotiated. Consistent with this, Illouz's discussion on frame confusion is relevant to a current concern in Western culture, whereby the lack of certainty and defined expectations in the context of casual sex may blur the boundaries of consent. As Illouz argues, the very nature of casual sex as 'cool, easy, emotionally detached [and] with no clear frame of definition' (p.151) diminishes the formality of consent. Therefore, Illouz's analysis provides a valuable resource to substantiate the importance of further research on the ambiguity surrounding casual sex and the ramifications of obscured consent.

In addition to providing a detailed analysis of 'unloving' by means of forming non-bonds, Illouz draws upon how 'unloving' manifests in the undoing of intimate bonds. Illouz draws upon the modern phenomena of ghosting and the much more traditional divorce process to contextualise undoing. Based on the notion that one can disappear as if one were a ghost, 'ghosting' refers to the ability to exit an intimate relationship at any point and without explanation (p.167). Comparably, Illouz also draws upon divorce to articulate how, despite differences in the means of undoing, both ghosting and divorce are responses to the same 'tectonic changes that courtship, intimacy, sexuality, the family and marriage have undergone' (p.183). This culminates in the ability to unilaterally end a relationship without consequence, as the freedom to enter an intimate bond is concomitant to the freedom to exit. Moreover, the undoing of bonds is not only indicative of the lack of reciprocity in modern love but an unwillingness to reconcile relationships. In this way, the formation of non-bonds, and the undoing of bonds, reveals a capitalist culture that enables the disposal and replacement of broken commodities, as opposed to the repair and reconciliation of them. However, albeit theorised as self-serving, the unwillingness to reconcile relationships is consistent with a culture of individualism that affords the freedom to exit a dissatisfying relationship, in pursuit of self-prioritisation. Especially pertinent to women, who were once both legally and morally obligated to remain in dissatisfying relationships, the shift towards individualism affords freedom to put oneself first and act according to self-interest. Hence, the ability to exit relationships can be understood as a form of liberation and empowerment, which may be of interest for Feminist research on personal life and the breakdown of relationships.

Beyond its contribution to the sociological literature on love and consumption, *The End of Love* provides a fascinating insight into a relatively ignored area of research on the breakdown of love. Written in an accessible style, Illouz provides a thorough yet succinct analysis on the effect of consumer capitalism on personal life, specifically, how the freedom afforded by capitalism has facilitated the process of 'unloving', characterised by the dissolution of intimate bonds, and the formation of bonds based on a negative structure. As well as introducing an original concept of 'unloving' (p.4), Illouz draws upon modern phenomena of ghosting, online dating and situationships (p.153) to deliver a wealth of current themes that could be subject to further discussion. With a range of captivating themes under the umbrella of love, *The End of Love* proves a valuable resource to sociologists interested in personal life, emotions and consumer culture. Beyond academic readership and the sociological community, Illouz's book would be of interest to psychologists, relationship experts, and those with interest or experience in the 'no-less-mysterious moment[s]' (p.3) where we fall out of love and avoid love entirely.

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