This is the published version of a chapter published in *Mediatisation of emotional life*.

Citation for the original published chapter:

Van Belle, J. (2022)
Love: Interpretative Film Strategy
In: Katarzyna Kopecka-Piech, Mateusz Sobiech (ed.), *Mediatisation of emotional life*
Routledge

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published chapter.

Permanent link to this version:
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:oru:diva-98660
Mediatisation of Emotional Life

Edited by Katarzyna Kopecka-Piech and Mateusz Sobiech

First published 2022

ISBN: 978-1-032-18106-6 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-032-18388-6 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-003-25428-7 (ebk)

5 Love

Interpretative film strategy

Jono Van Belle

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DOI: 10.4324/9781003254287-8
Introduction

Ingmar Bergman’s *Scener ur ett äktenskap* (Bergman, 1973), henceforth shortened as *Scener*, was broadcast as a television series in Sweden between 11 April 1973 and 20 May 1973 and released internationally as a feature film in 1974. In six episodes of approximately 50 minutes each, we witness the disintegration of a ten-year marriage between Johan and Marianne.

The early 1970s, together with the 1960s, was a turbulent time in terms of changing views on love and sexuality. Indeed, *Scener* had quite an impact in Sweden. We know that viewer rates rose from approximately 26% after the third episode up to 40% of the Swedish population by the time the last episode was broadcast. The audience consisted of twice as many women as men (Steene, 2005: 409). The importance of the series can also be observed in Swedish print media at the time, with discussions on the series and divorce in general. For example, the popular women’s magazine *Svensk Damtidning* ran articles in conjunction with the series on personal stories like those in *Scener*, from different perspectives. They even offered legal advice, educating housewives on their rights in a divorce.

The series allegedly contributed to an increase in divorces. Official statistics show how divorce rates in Sweden rise from 16.021 in 1973, when *Scener* was broadcasted, to 26.802 the year after (scb.se). More than encouraging divorce, the series most likely touched upon crucial changes in society and conceptions of love and marriage.

Although mediatisation deals with long-term cultural transformations in and through media (Hepp et al., 2015), *Scener* shows us how we can pinpoint specific media events that cause more radical changes than others. These cultural transformations cannot be disconnected from individual, emotional experiences of media. In this chapter, I consider the interactions between discursively formulated affect and individual viewing experiences, in particular for love narratives. After a discussion on affect and emotions in film studies, including their limitations, I address Staiger’s interpretative strategies (1992, 2000) as a possibility for analysing how social, historical
and cultural contexts facilitate certain emotional experiences. For applying this on Scener, I combine archival, textual and historical audience research.

**Affect and emotions in film studies**

Affect and emotions are undeniably part of our film experience. Both concepts are usually juxtaposed and mean different things, each time differing slightly (Sharma & Tygstrup, 2015). At large, two strands in the philosophy of emotions underlie this juxtaposition in film studies: Silvan Tomkins versus Gilles Deleuze and Baruch Spinoza. Firstly, American psychologist Silvan Tomkins’ work (Tomkins & Karon, 1962) has inspired the direction of seeing affect as the primary motivation system in human beings, amplifying human drives and lending them a sense of urgency. He identifies nine discrete human affects that each have their own neurological profile and physical response.

The cognitive approach to emotions in film studies may be positioned here. Their conception of filmic emotions is functional: emotions are the result of one’s interest in and appraisal of a given situation. We react appropriately based on an assessment of what is happening, usually to recurring existential human themes (see, e.g., Carroll, 2008).

The second influential strand in the philosophy of emotions builds on Spinoza’s theory of affect and Gilles Deleuze’s work (Gibbs, 2011). Here, affect is considered as an intensity rather than specific interior, corporeal, or social situations. Spinoza’s affection in each state is an encounter between one body and another, one affected and the other affecting (Shouse, 2005). This view is promoted in the study of culture and affect by Brian Massumi’s influential article, *The Autonomy of Affect* (1995). Contrary to the film-cognitive view, ideologies are crucial in the analysis of media and film, and their politics of emotions. A contemporary influential author within this tradition is Steven Shaviro. In *Post-cinematic Affect* (2010), he theorises video works as “machines capable of generating affect” (12), with a clear political focus in his approach to affective experiences. That political focus can also be found in Sara Ahmed’s work (2004, 2010). For her, emotions are the source of alignments with and against others, defining emotions as social and cultural practices.

In a viewing situation, emotions and affect are part of a complex feedback loop between depictions, individuals and audiences (Gibbs, 2011: 253). It is therefore worth including all these elements in an analysis of emotional experiences. Theoretically, I define affect and emotions making use of the cognitive view and Sara Ahmed’s view. In line with cognitivists, emotions are the specific feelings we experience and have access to. What cognitivists share with Ahmed is that they both consider the individual’s appraisal that results in specific emotions. But where cognitivists tend to see appraisal as a natural process, key to survival, Ahmed sees appraisal as an assessment of an object in relation to social, contextual norms. What is important for my argument is that affect circulates in society while emotions are properties
of the subject. The interaction between the two exists in that ascribing to social norms may be expected to give specific appraisals and interpretations of objects or situations (Peterson, 2006). Unlike Ahmed, I will not evaluate these norms as either positive or negative.

Love

This rough division between society and subject re-emerges in how love generally has been studied: from a sociological or a psychological point of view. In this chapter, I explore its more social and cultural dimensions as those definitions underlie social norms in any given society. In this, I still implicitly value the love experience as true to the individual.

Sociological approaches explore institutional and collective bases of personal thoughts, feelings and desires. For example, different authors agree that the association between romantic love (or passion), marriage and personal fulfilment in Western societies gradually developed throughout the 19th century as part of the romantic cult of individualism. Before that, marriage was mainly an economic and social way of organising family possessions and kinship (Giddens, 1992; Illouz, 2012; Kaufmann, 2011; Shumway, 2003).

Contemporary love encompasses two models that stand in a (conflicting) relation to each other. The model of marriage is irreconcilable with the model of an intense and all-consuming passion, and it requires considerable “cultural work” from the participants of a long-term relationship to manage both (Sprecher & Metts, 1999).

Interpretative strategies and studying emotions

For viewing, Janet Staiger (1992, 2000) has been quintessential in reconciling subject, text and context. A key concept is interpretative strategies. These strategies can be seen as the limited options that we, as audience, have to interpret a given text. These limitations are a consequence of context. Meanings are for Staiger structured around discourses in society, and as such, give rise to potentially dominant as well as alternative interpretations. Subject positions, in the form of social categories like gender or class, are essential to estimating which discourses are available for interpretation.

Staiger’s method allows for the operationalisation of context, something that otherwise often remains implicit in reception research (Mathieu et al., 2015: 44). Through extensive archival research, this method helps to explore potential interpretations through the debates that surrounded specific viewers at one point in time. But, if we want to study actual interpretations, we need to relate potential strategies to real audiences.

How do we unite interpretative strategies and emotional experiences? Assuming that people have conscious access to what they feel, interviewing provides us with insights into people’s assessments of their emotions. Here,
it is the interpretation of these emotions that matters, not whether these emotions are true or not.

When talking about past emotions, like memories in general, they are evaluated in relation to norms and dominant ideologies within a society and emotional behaviour is adapted accordingly. Learnt hierarchies of affect or social norms play a role in assessing what emotions are suitable to express or not in a given (interview) situation (Staiger, 2005: 89). Hence, when asking participants to reflect on their emotional experiences in the past, it is precisely the interaction between the emotions and the context that one studies. This leaves space for individual and social differences across participants yet pick up on general trends of interpretation as potentially cued by the text and context. Having insight into context, text and emotional experiences requires multiple methodologies, which is what I do in the following case study.

Case study: Ingmar Bergman’s Scener ur ett äktenskap (Ingmar Bergman, 1973)

The series depicts the how the marriage between Johan and Marianne evolves/dissolves and how both characters advance individually. Johan’s identity changes from one of self-confidence to doubt and insecurity about everything. Marianne, on the contrary, increasingly realises that she is only what others expect her to be as a wife and a mother. Her growing self-awareness is a typical theme for the 1970s and connects to the second wave of feminism during that period (Kalin, 2003).

While the series had huge success and was Bergman’s breakthrough among the wider Swedish audience (Steene, 1998), the audience likely came from middle- and higher-class backgrounds. Reasons for believing this are, firstly, that the middle class was most free to experiment with love and sexuality over the course of the 20th century, as they were less bound by economic restrictions. Secondly, Bergman was known to mainly portray problems and situations from a bourgeois ideology point of view, which is also why he was criticised in the 1960s (Bergom-Larsson, 1978; Widerberg, 1962). Like emancipation in general, people with low education and/or economic means likely had little opportunity to divorce. Also, my sample consists mostly of higher- and middle-class people. Therefore, it should be kept in mind that the impact of Scener discussed here is overestimated in comparison to the general Swedish population.

Turbulent times

The context of the series’ release, the 1970s, is a turbulent time for ideas on love and sexuality. However, already in the 17th century, we can see how – together with industrialisation and the rise of capitalism – marriage (a term in which I include all forms of long-term commitment relationships) was increasingly seen as a source for realising personal happiness and an
emotional, personal commitment (Kaufmann, 2011: 89; Shumway, 2003: 12). We can distinguish three stages of how men and women related to one another as a couple as society evolved from pre-industrial to modern times. Furthermore, the meaning of marriage and love changed both from a social perspective and from the point of implications for the individual. At first, neither men nor women had individual possibilities. The family was an economic unit and marriage partners were chosen accordingly. One’s sense of self was closely related to social surrounding, such as extended family and religious structures. As the extended family began eroding, men increasingly started organising their own lives while the family remained intact purely due to the (psychological and practical) confinement of women to the private sphere. Only at this point – in symbiosis with the industrial revolution – did marrying for love start to emerge. From around the 1960s, both men and women had increasing opportunities to make a life of their own (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995: 76).

At this time, love became the determining factor in one’s choice to marry in the West. The individual’s freedom to choose his/her own life became the general imperative to which all – both men and women – must conform. Society shapes demands and expectations, and it can be experienced as a personal failure when one is unable to meet them (Ben-Ze’ev & Goussinsky, 2008: 41). Paradoxically, as marriage became more a choice, the more pressure came from personal expectations (Shumway, 2003: 21–22). That is what individualisation implies: every individual governs his/her own choices so when there is a problem, it relates to the individual’s choice. As will be shown, the inability to deal with tensions between the social and individual dimension of love can be seen as the central theme of Scener and our interviewees’ struggles.

The way society predominantly defines love has repercussions for its depictions and interpretations. Dominant social norms serve as the backdrop for aligning or deviating stances to love as represented in culture and media (Shumway, 2003: 21–22). During the 20th century, audiovisual media have been key in the larger shifts in intimacy and romantic love in the west (Pava Vélez, 2022).

**Depictions of love**

That love is often present or even central in film seems almost too trivial to state. I argue that classical narration with linear progression tends to favour the representation of the love ideal as it developed over the last 100 years. As the goal of the character needs to be clear (Bordwell et al., 2015: 23), love is usually simplified into a knowable and straightforward feeling without doubts or contradictions, much in contrast to reality. The linear progression of the narrative facilitates the structuring of the – in reality ungraspable – process of falling in love in concrete steps. It is inherent to the idea of true love to be strong and resistant to any obstacle, which is exactly
what classical narration does. A road filled with obstacles is the basis of any classical narrative.

The use of close-ups underscores love at first sight, as if the portrayal of mere looks and eye-contact can make it emotionally clear to an audience that two characters are attracted to each other (Illouz, 2012: 210). Cinema as an audiovisual medium is far more suited to conveying looks than any other medium. Hence, it is ideal for presenting a love situation.

A further imperative in classical narration is closure – not necessarily meaning a happy ending. The aim is to give the audience a sense of closure, relief and relative tranquillity (Plantinga, 2009: 91–102). The wedding is for classical narration the ideal signifier of the duration of love in time, providing it with the closure it needs. In reality, weddings rarely symbolise this and often entail a practical approach to institutionalising love with planning long before the actual event takes place (Wilding, 2003). The fact that weddings stand for durability stems from reality, in that it is shaped as an ideal through its simplified use in classical films on love. There is a circularity at work where both ideas of marriage influence each other in culture.

Two important tensions arise where reality seems to stand in stark contrast to how love is represented. Firstly, there is a tension between passion and marriage: an everlasting passion is unattainable in a long-term relationship. In the filmic portrayal of love, there is no such tension. Hollywood films build on earlier traditions of romance novels where only what happens before marriage matters (Kaufmann, 2011: 94–95).

A second tension in representation occurs with the rapid emergence of women liberation movements from the 19th century onwards. The equality of the sexes is rarely portrayed within passionate love stories in films (Kaufmann, 2011: 94–95) nor in the happiness of marriage that society promotes (Ahmed, 2010).

In the following analysis, I will explore Scener in how it deviates – or not – from love ideals in particular and society in general at the time of its release.

Methodology

For understanding of the context of reception as well as individual emotional experiences, I used three methodologies: archival research, textual analysis of the series and audience interviews. I shortly elaborate on all three approaches.

Archive

Firstly, I investigated context-activated discourses on Bergman and his films through archival research, in line with Janet Staiger’s (2000) preferred methodology. The goal was to find which discourses were dominant during a given period and how these might have informed interpretations of the audience. I chose the daily mainstream press, as these have a wide reach in
society and produce many articles, a combination that guarantees enough repetition as to reconstruct dominant patterns and discourses. Concerning the newspapers, I simply chose those that had the largest reach in Sweden, mixing up-market and tabloid newspapers: Expressen, Dagens Nyheter, Svenska Dagbladet and Aftonbladet, for the period 1944–1983 (Bergman’s most active years as a film-maker) in the digitalised press archive of Kungliga Biblioteket in Stockholm, Sweden.

**Text**

Staiger claims that the text is important in that it provides “sense-data” (Staiger, 1992: 48). To strengthen the triangulation, I focus on two aspects of the text: narrative progression and characters. Next, I explore which emotions, but also which deeper social meanings, these aspects relate to. For my specific case, I examine love, and to a lesser extent, marriage as love’s institutionalised form. I textually explore potential meanings and feelings to then triangulate with the interviews, both strengthening the textual analysis and contextualising my findings.

**Historical audiences**

I explore cinema and film memories through 20 in-depth interviews conducted in Sweden. Since I needed those audiences who lived through changing conceptions of love in the 1960s–1970s, the condition was that participants were born before 1960 and needed to have seen at least one Bergman film in the cinema at the time of release. People were recruited mainly based on availability. In the second instance, additional participants were gathered via the snowball method (Goodman, 1961).

These semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted face to face during 2015 and 2016, in people’s own homes or at a location of their choice. I asked questions related to the series but also concerning the respondents’ ideas on love and sexuality in general. A drop-off was taken at the start of each interview (age, sex, social background, education, place of upbringing, cultural habits, as well as which Bergman-films they had seen, and which were their favourites).

Participants were made anonymous and categorised according to age, sex, political orientation and class background. The latter was constructed through where they grew up, their own and their parents’ level of education, profession and self-identification. Even though statistical representativeness was not the objective of this study, I still aimed for as much variation as possible within these four parameters to account for a variety of experiences. Most participants had a middle- or upper-class background. This bias is probably due to self-selection, as these class backgrounds appear to “use” Bergman more for displaying their own cultural development, and if anything, they are self-confident enough to be interviewed about it. Most
participants were women (13/20) born in the 1940s. A possible explanation for this imbalance is that the persona of Ingmar Bergman in Sweden was highly sexualised or celebritised, generally appealing more to women. After the interviews were transcribed, I analysed the interviews bottom-up, using a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 2006). For love in particular, the following topics emerged: changing society and emancipation for women; gender, class and generational differences; ideas on marriage; definitions and meaning of love (including monogamy); the difference between infatuation and love; and the difference between love and lust.

**Viewing Scener with love**

My interviews show clear signs of authorship and Bergman’s persona as an influential strategy for interpretation, which I have discussed elsewhere (Van Belle, 2019). Here, I will only focus on how interpretations of the depicted love relationship are potentially based on ideas of love that have a social and cultural basis.

Most important to my analysis of Scener are the competing cultural frames of the ideal of romantic love versus the institutional organisation of a long-term relationship or marriage. Participants experience and manage these frames personally as well as apply them to the series for interpreting. Firstly, I will discuss love and sexuality in the text. Secondly, I discuss how the participants have used these frames for interpreting their emotional experiences.

**Framing the characters**

Common to Bergman’s work is an extensive use of close-ups, most often when the viewer gains psychological insight into a character through lines of dialogue, monologue, or in discussions between characters. In the narrative, two equally important protagonists seem to have opposed goals at the outset, but they come together in the end. Different scenes seem to alternate focus on either Marianne or Johan. This is supported by a subtle play of reaction shots where one is more closely framed than the other, depending on the focus of the scene. The alternating sympathy is especially present in the television series and explains some of its far-reaching success for both men and women. This potential attraction for all kinds of viewers is strengthened through how both characters behave equally morally and immorally.

Camera framing reveals more about the evolution of the couple in Scener. In the beginning, they are often framed together, and it feels almost clausrophobic. More and more, as the film unfolds, they appear in separate and wider-angle shots, only to be reunited within one shot again in the last episode, upon reconciliation of Johan and Marianne. In the most extreme example, the camera cuts to a long shot right before they start fighting over the divorce. The camera strongly reinforces and symbolises the mental distance between the main characters.
The framing differs interiorly versus exteriorly. The rare exterior shots have a more liberating feel to them with the use of bird view camera angles and extreme wide shots. An example is when the couple drives to work in the second episode, implying that when both are at work doing their own thing, they are “freer,” which stands in opposition to being locked inside in their house and marriage. The use of framing echoes the imperative of freedom of choice for the individual versus its social limitations.

Liberation

Both characters go through opposite personal evolutions. These evolutions resonate with changes in society like the sexual and women’s liberation. Where Johan seems to have a clearly defined identity in the very first scene, Marianne can barely describe herself outside of her marriage to Johan and in relation to her children. In the third episode, when Johan confesses his infidelity to Marianne, these identities reach an extreme. Marianne is making sandwiches for Johan while he is talking about his unfaithfulness. Marianne takes the blame while Johan takes up the victim role. As Johan is planning to leave for Paris for a year the morning after, Marianne proposes to pick up his favourite suit from the dry cleaner. She shows compassion when he states that he cannot take their restrictive life any longer. While she increasingly becomes aware of her own socialisation as a woman, she still performs her mothering role. It is only near the end of the series that she seems to have gained distance from that role, accentuated by low angle shots of her, bestowing more power on her through the cinematography.

At this point in the series, the roles have reversed, and it is Johan who proposes to go out for dinner, while all dinner-related dialogue and action before was initiated by Marianne. Johan’s identity becomes unstable from the fourth episode on and particularly in the fifth. As his career goes downhill, he becomes insecure and “wants to come home” to the family that gave him a secure surrounding, materially but also in terms of (gender) identity. Implicitly, Johan’s coming home means that Marianne needs to revert to her previous, strongly gendered role of supporting Johan, which she is not prepared to do anymore. Gender roles and increased awareness of these roles are crucial to how the story develops. When Marianne thereupon rejects him, Johan becomes aggressive, and they fight. This violent scene is vital in the build-up towards the end. Even though couples hate each other throughout Bergman’s oeuvre, it is rare to see physical violence. It is the absolute lowest of lows that are shown here, which is meaningful as it is the first time they openly show their emotions, giving force to the reconciliation that happens in the next episode (Kalin, 2003). It is only when there are no expectations left that a new type of love can be established.

In the last episode of the series, their initial identities have reversed: Johan does not know who he is while Marianne is satisfied with her identity. The sexual liberation that she boasts represents her liberation in a wider sense.
This relates to the evolution towards the autonomy of sex, linked to Marianne’s liberation as a woman. The evolution of both characters seems to be a measure of their sense of identity and the extent to which they can feel successful in (any kind of) love.

**Love in Scener**

Two related components constitute what love means in *Scener*: the material and the everyday. Both can be seen as ways of dealing with contradictory frames for organising the love ideal. The fact that Johan and Marianne got together for practical reasons and only later fell in love is valuable to the story. It is exactly “the practical” consideration as a reason for (maintaining) marriage that *Scener* seems to resist from the very beginning. When Johan and Marianne speak about separation after Johan’s confession, they mainly speak about financial issues. Through the dialogue we learn that Johan gives up the material for the emotional, as if both oppose each other. This idea relates to the described tension between passion and marriage as institutionalised love. This tension persists throughout the series: in the ambiguous end scene, they can only be “happy” and emotionally close when all the practical, the everyday and the material is gone.

The second, related component of love in *Scener* is the everyday. Throughout the series, the perfect “everyday” is used in a magnificent way as it highlights the banality of their marriage. Ironically, it is this habit that Johan longs for when wanting to return home later on.

**Audience responses**

Many participants indicated that the series was recognisable. Often, the series was evaluated in relation to the reality the participants live in, either their own or their parents’ relationship. The framework of the love ideal and its conflicts between passion and marriage facilitate a certain interpretation. The potential experience of love and its ambiguities is emotional for individual viewers but is connected to the social norms of love.

Firstly, I explore what images the participants have constructed in relation to these social norms. Next, in relation to the series, we will see that only those few who had deviant love images remember subversive aspects of the series. Ideal images of love that are available in society at the time further play a role in viewing in that they help shape desires for where the characters may end up (“happy” or perhaps “together again”). The framework of the love ideal and its conflicts between passion and marriage facilitates a certain interpretation.

**Sexual revolution**

The sexual revolution recurs in individual accounts. One woman (b. 1946) considers her life to be a personal revolution, where her first marriage took her
out of her family home to a different city and into a new life. The best thing she ever did was to divorce from her first husband and to “live like men live”:

Interviewer: that you lived on your own terms, was that something you as a woman fought with? That you were a woman who lived like that? Or was it . . .

Participant: That’s what I thought, exactly that, now I will live like men live. Now I will have my different male acquaintances and I decide on my life within my four walls, my home. That’s where they enter and where I decide who can enter and who cannot.

Interviewer: That sounds fantastic

Participant: I succeeded in that . . . but you know, it was a bit like that after my first divorce, it was a bit this. . . . I needed to actualise myself, I needed to live alone, I needed my company, to do like I wanted to and ehhhhmmm if there was anyone, I did not want to live together with anyone, I just had these different men that I met every now and then, as I wanted it myself. Multiple of them proposed, and then I just thought “now I have to run” [LAUGHS] “now I have to run!” because I absolutely did not want to live with anybody else.

We see Marianne in Scener go through a similar evolution. Sexuality is defined in gendered terms, where men were or are freer than women. Many women take up a position in relation to the liberated woman ideal that is represented by Marianne by the end of the series. In this sense, the changing view on love in society clearly recurs in the reflections from my participants on love. Many participants recognised that things changed and were different for them in comparison to their parents. Many women in particular told me about their emancipation, not necessarily individually but rather in terms of possibilities. Some female participants recall the opening of the first day-care and how revolutionary that was. It became an “ugly” thing to be a housewife. Different female participants stated it was self-evident women would study and earn their own money. Different women succeed, to varying degrees, in including their partners in household chores. Some feel the need to justify why they did not have an equal share in their marriage, illustrating the norm of “having” equality at home (even though reality probably looked different for most women). It also confirms that not being able to conform to this ideal is experienced as a personal failure as it is a conflict that arises in relation to societal norms. The justification points to an alignment with morals that circulate within society.

In talking about love with my participants, two tropes return: love is beyond description, and it produces predetermined feelings. Love is commonly
perceived as a unique experience, yet interpretations and expressions of love seem to be very much standardised, such as the tendency to reduce love to biology or that love is beyond our control (Johnson, 2005: 28–33). Returning characteristics are “to give yourself,” “compromise,” “unity and reciprocity” (mainly women), “compassion,” and “accept the other one as he or she is.” Some (mainly men) define love in individualistic terms, for example, “to feel good about oneself.” Most participants see infatuation – which cannot be controlled – as a first stage, often the precondition for love, after which love settles down and becomes more something that needs to be managed and needs to grow, echoing the previously discussed view on love as competing cultural frames. Most participants claim they became more “realistic” as they grew older, implying less self-sacrificing and less emotionally intense relationships. The following quotes reflect the past or present relationship where the past version is used interchangeably with the present version of the self. At the same time, we see a struggle with the societal love ideal of combining passion with everyday love. We see a strong link to what is represented in Scener and what I have defined as the “everyday” conception of love.

Love is something that we should have in our everyday life, when you live with someone else, right? It’s again about what I said earlier, much trust and confidence, and that two people can live together, have a dialogue, talk to each other. And then this passion, passionate love that I talk about, one should have it sometimes, but you cannot live with it [LAUGHS] that just brings problems.

– female, b. 1946

The change in conceptions of love for my participants lies mainly in increased opportunities and choices for women: in terms of who they were with or not and in terms of love and sexual encounters. For the organisation of love relationships, almost all participants relied on the institutionalised and heteronormative idea of marriage as the dominant social norm. It is precisely this practical, material and socially ideal form of love that is under scrutiny in Scener. That many people expressed perceiving the representations as “realistic” confirms this. The emotional force of the series can be seen in the elicitation of emotion in relation to social, moral and ideological norms on love. The series made people reflect on their own situations and life, and for some, it even gave new perspectives.

Participant: I was pregnant at the time. There was much that happened during that pregnancy and in our relationship. So, I started wondering right then in 1973–1974, will this last? Will our marriage last? But that had little to do with Scener. Or perhaps I cannot say it so straightforward like that, maybe it had an additional influence.

Interviewer: Did you watch it with your husband?
Participant: Yes
Interviewer: Did you talk about it?
Participant: We already had said everything there was to say by then . . . the things that happened . . . because things happened. 1973, very serious things and before I gave birth and so on. So that ehhhh for me that was a crisis year. That’s how I remember it. I cannot say it was related to Scener, but it was generally that everyone started talking about it back then, how is it really, how do we have it?

– female, b. 1945

As the quote illustrates, most people evaluate the series from the perspective of a dominant love ideal that corresponds to their own striving in love and life. Another confirmation of this, and against my expectations of the sixties generation, is that nearly all participants considered the presence of love to be necessary for having sex.

Participant: Honestly . . . when you . . . now I am a product of the sixties but I am not a product of that time when you can have sex as . . . casually . . . no, sex is something very serious. It is precious.
Interviewer: Do you find love to be a precondition for sex?
Participant: Yes, I find that because it is so revealing

– female, b. 1945

Interviewer: Is there a difference between sex with and without love?
Participant: Yes, I think so.
Interviewer: Is there a hierarchy?
Participant: Yes, a desirable hierarchy [LAUGHS] I find that. It should be a hierarchy.

– female, b. 1941

The following female participant (b. 1939) is an exception. Remarkably, with her deviant ideas from social norms of love and sex, she remembers different aspects of the series, indicating the link between society, norms and emotional interpretations:

Interviewer: Is love related to sex and lust?
Participant: No, I don’t think so. Both can exist without the other. Sex with love is an expression of something deeper, but sex can be united with friendship too. That’s typical of the 1960s. That didn’t exist earlier. . . .
Interviewer: Do you find the representation of love and relationships in Scener was innovative, or did it fit into everything else that was broadcast at the time?
Participant: It stood out. If that would have been like any other television series, the streets wouldn’t have been empty at the time of broadcast. There was a brutal openness and brutal revelations, and two people that really dared to talk to one another in the end. And that is why they came back to each other, because they succeeded to unravel what they liked and didn’t like. They had lived out all their aggressions very openly towards each other, and then there is only the essence left. And that was exactly how I had it with my ex-husband and so I saw it as a confirmation, yes, one can have it like that, and it doesn’t have to be wrong.

This specific memory is primarily affective as she can relate the scene to her own life. Arguably, the affective dimension in combination with an alternative view on love is precisely the reason why hers and not anyone else’s memory of the deviating (from the social norm of love) ending exists today. This illustrates the interpretation of affect as I laid out the concept earlier: an interaction between discursive affect in terms of love as a social norm and the individual emotional experience of what she saw in relation to that norm.

Conclusion

Through interviews, we can explore the emotions that the viewer has conscious access to and interprets. The contextual setting is seen as an enrichment to the interpretative affect, as it gives insight into how feelings are evaluated, both then and now, and what meaning this affect has for the interviewee. It also gives insight into a wider cultural tendency to conceive of specific affects or emotions as more valuable than others, pointing towards contextual influences. The limitations of much textual research are overcome as we no longer base affect on assumptions of discourse or emotion nor construct a universal spectator.

Many participants recognise themselves in the love of Marianne and Johan as it includes the everyday struggles and conflicts this ideal encompasses. Two types of responses can be seen: the emotional and the social. The social encompasses how people communicate about a film and how that influences their experience (e.g. discussing love and their own situations). These evaluations circulate (discursively) within society and eventually contribute to canonisation and future reception in the form of an available interpretation. The emotional response relates to both discourse and one’s own situation, and it is entangled with the text and its representations. How people speak about their interpretations confirms the persistence of normatively evaluating the series in terms of how one’s own or one’s parents’ relationship should be. Managing cultural frames such as the passion versus marriage ideal is part of this.
In conclusion, assumptions on emotional and interpretative elicitations by the text are in this chapter substantiated and framed within specific historical, cultural and social circumstances. By investigating social norms of love, our understanding of audience interpretations and emotional experiences can be deepened in a new way. The chapter illustrates how understanding viewing as merely contextual or individual are reductive ways of approaching our interaction with media. Ultimately, the theoretical discussion presented here offers opportunities to forego dualist approaches to affect, emotions and (historical) reception in favour of a more comprehensive understanding of that interpretative emotional experience as a whole.

References


