

## THE SWEET POISON OF LOVE IN ADOLESCENCE AND EARLY ADULTHOOD

Love in youth is often fascinating, captivating, and total. It can be like this already when an elementary school student falls for a classmate who sits at the next desk tugging at his or her heartstrings or when a pubescent directs his or her passionate admiration and secret dreams at a public figure. Love is true for many youngsters also in these experiences. Falling in love becomes particularly touching on the threshold of adulthood during the first steps of dating. It can be like grace, anxiety, and fascination simultaneously (Bauminger et. al., 2008; Person, 2007).

When in love, emotional experiences and behavior get their peculiar form. Still, falling in love and the way one shows it are learned to a great extent and respond to those social and societal expectations leveled at people. As far as is known, Francois de la Rochefoucauld has said: "There are people who would never have fallen in love if they never heard of love" (Grant, 1976, p. 12).

All things considered, people preconceive love based on the models, stories, rules, and rituals that are transmitted to them from generation and society to another. Show business provides us with its own points of comparison. We are being taught what love is. We learn to interpret and show love in a certain way. Additionally, we learn about love and our experiences of love by ourselves (Fonagy et al., 2002).

In this article, a pioneering research on love is dissected as a basis of empirical research. In this research, the focus is on the experiences of love in adolescence and early adulthood: What do the youth tell about their feelings of falling in love: how touching it is and how to handle the crises it creates?

### WHAT DOES FALLING IN LOVE INVOLVE?

"Falling in love is madness," many famous authors have stated. Robert Burton (1651/1963) noted in the 17th century, that not only love is madness but also "disease, spree, agony" and described in great detail the shaking and negative influence of love both on individuals and the whole society. This is how he also showed his respect for Francis Bacon who stated quite resolutely at the end of the 16th century that "it is impossible to be in love and be wise" (Bacon, 1557/1955, p. 28). Bacon's thoughts are greatly supported in Shakespeare's pieces as well.

Later on, the definitions of the nature of falling in love have been presented more and more. Alberoni (1979) describes falling in love as assimilation; Tennov (1979) refers to limerence; Girard (1972) talks about losing oneself and Fromm (1956) about the disappearance of individuality; Askew (1965) refers to neurosis, Kilpatrick (1974) to anti-social behavior, and Stendahl (in 1830/1957) to crystallizing.

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On the contrary, love can be understood as a divine phenomenon, a manifestation of immortality among mortal people, and a way and accession to holiness (Irigaray, 1982).

Erich Fromm (1956) considers love as an active power that connects people with each other. It makes isolation and loneliness to disappear providing the feeling of unity and security.

The we-experience that two people in love share can be quite world-shaking by its depth: Francesco Alberoni (1979) felicitously regards falling in love as the derivation of twopeople mass movement.

All this and much more are written in the myths, fairytales, and stories of humankind already centuries ago in the same way as today. Falling in love is really “a many-splendored thing” as was the name of Han Suyi’s novel from 1952. This also in line with John Lee’s (1973) famous love typology; he used this typology to analyze the conceptions and essence of love through the analogy of colors and the colors of a rainbow.

Lee distinguishes six ways of falling in love of which three (eros, ludu, and storge) are the primary and three (mania, pragma, and agape) secondary ways of falling in love. Several various combinations are located between these dimensions.

Because of the numerous definitions for love the whole verbal illustration of love can be questioned: the words seem to be too platitudinous and ordinary by the side of flamboyant and omnipotent love. Nor is the language the only one being insufficient; consciousness and intelligence have their limits also when trying to comprehend what happens in love.

### FROM “FALLING IN LOVE” TO “BEING IN LOVE”

Loving is different than falling in love. Usually, love begins with falling in love. It is a gate to love; yet, faraway from love (e.g., Riela et al., 2010).

Falling in love can be a powerful emotional whirlwind that outruns everyday life. It can be magic of joy and happiness, excitement and pleasure, corroded by insecurity and the fear of losing love. For some, love develops little by little based on friendship without any hot whirlpool of passion. Another tends to fall in love by deliberate pondering about the mutual compatibility and the progress of love affair (Määttä, 2005a, 2006; Pines, 1999).

Answers to the question of what happens when one falls in love are manifold. The opinions of personality theorists can be divided into two schools. Some consider falling in love as a valuable experience: it enhances the development of the integration of an individual’s identity and personality (Erikson, 1968; Jung, 1925/1959; Kernberg, 1977).

However, some other theorists (Casler, 1973; De Rougemont, 1956; Schaeffer, 1987; Tennov, 1979) emphasize the negative consequences of falling in love: it strengthens irrationality and dependency.

Similar numerous phase descriptions about the origin of love and its stages have been drawn up. Braiker and Kelley (1979) noted that a love affair develops by four

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phases (casual dating, serious dating, engagement, and marriage) each of which includes four different dimensions: love, conflict, maintenance, and ambivalence.

Goldstine et al. (1977) have identified three phases of a love affair. The first phase is the period of falling in love where the partners feel passion, tension, insecurity, and vulnerability. This phase is the time for high self-respect and reciprocity as well as idealization. The second phase is the period of disappointment and alienation. A couple find themselves extremely different from each other; blaming the other and disappointments are typical in this phase. The probability of breaking up is at its highest. If a couple gets through this phase, they will move on to the third one where the expectations to each other become more realistic. On the one hand, in a relationship, the partners experience powerful appreciation to individuality and, on the other hand, security as well. In Goldstine et al.'s theory, love turns from romantic, passionate love into realistic, "companionable" (Walster & Walster, 1978), "mature", or "right kind of" love (Hatfield, 1988), if the partners manage to overcome the period of unwelcome emotions.

Tzeng (1992) has specified the development of love by eight stages (Octagonal Stage Model), Coleman (1997) have introduced a five-step model, and Levinger (1983) ABCDEmodel (Acquaintance, Buildup, Continuation, Deterioration, Ending model). Alberoni (1979) considers the process of falling in love as a sort of series of tests. With these tests, one seeks security and answers, for example, to the questions of whether the other loves enough, whether this love is real, whether he or she is able to break away from the other, and so on. If a couple gets through these phases, falling in love will proceed into a deeper phase that could be called "loving".

The abovementioned general descriptions of the process of falling in love tend to repeat almost the same features. Romantic love is seen as a linear process: a couple falls in love, loves each other, and either loses love or deepens it. In this perspective, the very first love is quite special by its emotional and learning experience; and, usually, takes place in adolescence. This article concentrates on the phenomenon of falling in love in adolescence and early adulthood.

Regardless of age and various theories, the event of falling in love however is one-of-a-kind for everyone; nor does it progress by any general model. Everyone loves by their own way and the experience of falling in love is individual, unique, and subjective. (Dion & Dion, 1973; Hatfield, Schmitz, Cornelius, & Rapson, 1988; Hegi & Bergner, 2010; Määttä, 2005a; 2006; Sternberg, 1988).

## THE AIM OF THIS STUDY

Prof. Määttä started a research project in Finland which aimed at analyzing the content and meaning of love scheme as a part of young adults' life span and identity formation. This study was divided into several separate parts. The purpose of this article is to dissect the experience of falling in love and to illustrate the phases and progress of the process of falling in love through the young adults' descriptions.

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This article aims at describing, classifying, and analyzing how people experience falling in love after meeting their partners or significant others. What happens when people fall in love? What kind of feelings and thoughts falling in love arouses among them and how does it reflect in their behavior? According to the participants, what kind of changes does falling in love cause in them? What phases can be found in falling in love among young adults? What kind of differences can be found between different people during the process of falling in love? These questions can be crystallized into the form of the following research question: How do the young adults describe their experiences of falling in love?

### METHODS

The research data were collected in two phases. The research participants were under 25-year-old students of the University of Lapland, Finland. A sample of one hundred students was selected from the student record with a systematic random sample. These students were invited with an invitation letter to an interview. Eventually, 42 students of the sample agreed to be interviewed and arranged time for interview. However, seven of them did not arrive at the interview. Therefore, the eventual number of interviewees was 35 (22 women and 13 men). They represented equally various marital status; both unmarried and married or co-habiting couples. For some, the first love in adolescence had developed into a permanent relationship; the others had had several experiences of falling in love and break-ups.

The purpose was to turn the interview situation as an open conversation situation pursuing genuineness and confidentiality. In addition, most of the students who participated in the research appeared talkative and sincere. They told about their willingness to participate because the theme was “so wonderful” and because “it is nice that for once this kind of issue is studied and not just always some spending for instance”. Part of those who had a positive attitude were experiencing “the happy first flush of love” at that moment or wanted to participate because “falling in love is a thing that I haven’t ever known...” The interview situation seemed to have offered them a chance to analyze their course of life and identity formation.

The theme for the research and interview seemed to clearly divide the students into two groups: either the issue was considered too intimate and sensitive, or they were immediately delighted with the humane and different theme. The fact that to what extent those who refused to participate would have contributed to the present research results remains unknown. This information that the participants gave introduced the vast spectrum of this theme. Altogether, the research data thus proved to be relatively plentiful: this is worth remembering as the sufficiency of research data is one criterion for the outer validity.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that the criteria for the reliability of qualitative research could be the member checks on the information distribution and how apt its interpretations and conclusion are. Love as a research subject is sensitive and delicate; thus, it is not easy to be sure how openly and honestly the students were

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able to analyze their conceptions and experiences. However, we wanted to discover the truthfulness of their answers. In other words, the aim was to estimate how much the students had left untold, how much they have consciously or unconsciously wanted to repress or forget things, whether the answers would have changed if the other partner had also been telling about his or her side of the story, etcetera. These matters were deciphered by asking the research participants' conceptions of the functionality of the interview and their own openness and sincerity directly. The answers the students gave support the idea of the reliability of the research data:

This was exciting... I didn't have any reason to lie. I find it very interesting to find out what the others have told; maybe I'd learn something... My experiences are so minimal... I have described them in the way I experience them. I told everything as they are... maybe by being shy and on the face of it a little bit; I'm not used to discuss these things. That recording made me nervous at first but... maybe I described one guy in a little bit too a rough manner but you won't reveal the names anywhere.

The interviews lasted between one and two hours, were recorded, and transcribed carefully.

Next, the interview data were expanded with essays. A group of teacher students in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lapland wrote an essay about "At that time, I was in love" as an assignment in a Finnish lesson. This data consisted of 20 essays, from two to five sheets long.

These two sets of data were analyzed simultaneously in the empirical analyses. Thus, the analysis is based on the experiences of 55 people.

The analysis proceeded hermeneutically from theory to empirical perspectives and vice versa. The method is heuristic and exploring by nature: on the one hand, it tests and adapts the previous research results and theory, and on the other hand, it looks for a new outline (Silverman, 2006).

The data analysis was inductive and qualitative as the aim was to discover generalizations, consistencies, and categories from the interview data and essays to create a digestible description of the extremely multi-dimensional and comprehensive phenomenon of falling in love. The data were described, analyzed, categorized, and compared in order to be able to form as extensive answer to the research question as possible.

## RESULTS

### *Where Does Love Start?*

Where does love start or how invented love are questions deliberated by poets and composers all over again. This is of great interest. Hardly anyone finds it easy to explain how their personal love began or what made them fall in love. "It is hard to

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tell,” “It just started,” “The other just happened to be there,” and “It started in the spring” appear to be felicitous remarks (see also Young, 1997).

When analyzing the participants’ experiences, it seems that the beginning of love was not by any means “written in the stars” or “determined by destiny or amour” but a result of even rational action as well (see also Barelds & Barelds-Dijkstra, 2007).

Falling in love is possible if one is willing or wants to fall in love (see Masters & Johnson, 1986). Then, falling in love is considered positive, important, and desirable. The wish to fall in love also embodies lovelorn or the hunger of love (see Grant, 1976) or is a consequence of the desire to be loved.

My emotional life needed refreshment and then I met him.

For the young, the model of juvenile culture may provide the impetus for the readiness to fall in love. Young people find it important to lean on others of the same age, act in the same way, and thus, pursue strengthening their own position. Indeed, the reason for falling in love can be the pressure from a peer group: it seems important to date because everybody else is dating (e.g., Regan & Dreyer, 1999). This is how the young want to show their friends and parents that they are able to correspond to the expectations of young people having a boyfriend or a girlfriend.

At that time, it would elevate your status if you had a boyfriend.

You were supposed to date with someone... the boy kind of aided in that.

The readiness to fall in love can also represent people’s willingness to change. If life is tangled, soul is wounded, or the landmarks of one’s own development and future are lost, love can be used as a magical mirror through which the circumstances appear in a better way. People may believe that love offers the first aid and way out from the agonized life situation. (O’Sullivan, 2008.)

Young people can find falling in love as a means to cut loose from childhood home. Finding someone to date with seems attractive as such; it opens the entrance to adulthood. Then, selecting partner can exemplify a way to rebel against authorities; the young can find their way to such a person who is the perfect opposite of the parents’ wishes.

That boy was a horrible hooligan, my parents did not approve me hanging out with him at all... that was kind of rebellion against my parents.

Young people can show that they are on their own and it is about their personal choices.

I didn’t care who he was as long as he/she loved me back... it was connected with maturing; I found it necessary to do like adults did.

### *What Happens When You Fall in Love?*

Falling in love ignites imagination. When putting one’s heart and soul into love, one does not look with the eyes but with the mind (see Freud, 1914/1957: May,

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1969; Hartman & Basile, 2003). With fantasies, people can see love in the way they want.

Soon he just started to seem like the man of my dreams... I thought that he was the one for me.

Reality and the whole existence become ennobled in a manner of speaking.

I found myself enjoying all the small things.

Life is good and the whole existence reflects the bright gloss of newness.

I was so energetic and active and filled with powerful feelings.

Experiences of symbiosis and regression take place at the initial stage of falling in love (Mahler, 1974). The one in love starts behaving like a little child. Falling in love serves the aspiration to revive the experiences of happiness and pleasure from early childhood.

It was so good and easy to be with her from the beginning: she really understood me and we didn't have to say everything out loud.

Similarly, the need for intimacy and affection, as well as sexuality, strengthens (e.g., Eisenman, 2001). Lovers want to be with together and long for each other's proximity.

We just sat in each other's arms, enjoyed each other's proximity.

The other one's company is like balsam. Togetherness is enjoyable and along with it mutual trust, tenderness, and sexuality are strengthened.

I missed his endearments and wanted to give those to him/her as well. You would give everything, wouldn't you?

Togetherness and isolation appear more powerful (e.g., Arditti & Kauffman, 2003). Togetherness is so intensive, that the moments apart rend.

I thought that I would die if the other wasn't there.

Togetherness is the only thing that matters. The surrounding world disappears. Lovers see only each other and are happy together.

As if you weren't in this world, that you just hope that you could be and let yourself float.

Sense of time disappears: here and now. Lovebirds even apprehend time in a different way than others. They took the time they need and set aside everything else they can in order to be together (Fenchel, 2005.) They would prefer time to stop when "the world gives its best".

Caring secures. Also mutual caring and tenderness increase. It seems as if the lovers had a sixth sense which they use to sense what the partner needs. Whether one desires more caring, independence, or safety, that is exactly what the other offers; and

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no words are needed (e.g., Kito, 2005). It seems that lovers are capable of extremely skilled unconscious performances when adjusting to each other's expectations.

You care so much about the other that you want to, you know, start taking care of the other in a way that it outstrips even your own needs.

When lovers nourish each other with spontaneous caring, togetherness becomes enjoyable and easy without saying anything. They become more and more certain that living together will go without problems: they both know what the other one needs (e.g., Feenye & Van Vleet, 2010).

I thought that he was the one for me. I thought that he would be a good partner to live with and plan the future together.

Childish manner of speaking and playful behavior. Lovers' mutual manner of speaking resembles infants' language. They coddle and it seems that they have an endless amount of the terms of endearments for each other.

We didn't lack of nicknames: honey, sugar honey pie, funny tummy, goldilocks.

They laugh at the same things and discover new reasons for joy spreading cheerfulness, joy, and energy around them. Lovers need for togetherness and touching each other may arise from their disbelief of what has happened to them (e.g., Gordon, 2008). They have to make themselves certain that this all is for real by touching each other. The language of touching helps to adjust without words.

I couldn't believe what had happened... that this kind of amazing feeling of happiness, and then again, I was afraid or felt insecure if this will last.

When falling in love, also fears and insecurity start gnawing. Therefore, not only many previously experienced feelings of happiness from childhood revive but also confusion and fears: the fear of excessive intimacy, the fear of losing love (e.g., Mietzner & Lin, 2005.) Even the fact that one does not know the other very well yet is subject to cause insecurity (e.g., Bauminger et. al., 2008).

What if one falls in love entirely and if the other one leaves; how you will handle that.

### *Love Blinds You: The Significant Other Dazzles*

The one in love sees the other as ideal through the rosetinted spectacles. No wonder they say that love is blind.

That girl was like an answer to all those wishes what I could ever have expected of a woman.

Looking with the eyes of love the pockmarks seem dimples, says a proverb. When falling in love, even the negative features are seen as a positive light or explained in



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a positive manner (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996). This can result from the desire to ensure or stabilize the continuity of the romance. Sometimes one's image of the loved one is more real to him/her than the brute truth (e.g., Person 2007).

I clothed him with the colors of my yearning.

Love believes in good. Almost all the other one's features are seen as positive and lovable although they might be troublesome for the life together. At the phase of admiring, the target for love is thus regarded as one-of-a-kind, exceptional, and irreplaceable.

The personality of that person made me fall in love; the personality was so strong.

This is how the beneficial conditions for a successful relationship are created (e.g., Dindia & Emmers-Sommer, 2006).

She is everything to me... I love her and nothing on earth can change it.

*The Magical Mirror of Falling in Love: One's Own Self  
Becomes Stronger*

Along with falling in love, an individual's image of himself or herself becomes stronger in many ways. One feels more skilled and capable than before, the expansion of the contents of self takes place, as well as self-esteem increases (see Aron, Paris, & Aron, 1995).

I noticed new things in myself; I laughed more, I was more social, I felt being filled with energy. That was a wonderful feeling.

When the partners try to reveal and specify the features in themselves, falling in love may also improve selfknowledge (Leary, 2001). When being endorsed, cared, and appreciated, the young become ensured that they are good and worth loving.

I enjoyed all the attention that this person gave me.

When in love, the young expect, or actually are out for, positive estimations from the target of their love.

When I knew that the other cared, I was able to get rid of my insecurity.

Sometimes the eagerness to fall in love can be so compulsive that the dividing line between love and deep gratefulness for positive feedback becomes unclear. At the time life being filled with conflicts and crises, the need for finding a point of reference—a magical mirror, which reflects oneself as good and beautiful—is the most absolute. People in general tend to wish for praise and appreciation, rewards and recognition: "people have a passion for praise", as Swann, De LaRonde, and Hixon (1994) point out.

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The young make the effort of giving a fascinating or favorable impression of themselves to the target of their admiration or love. If one's own self-esteem has been desolated, being praised and appreciated is outstandingly grand, primary, and flattering in love (Hancock & Toma, 2009; Haselton et al., 2005). Parents may even find a youngster's ways of strengthening self-esteem deplorable.

Some become addicted to falling in love (e.g., Capell-Sowder, 1994; Fenchel, 1998; Schaeffer, 1987). This addiction results in the spiral of love, love addiction, when an individual is enchanted of being enchanted, besotted with being besotted, and in love with falling in love. This can also be described as love dependence, an obsession, which makes people repeat the same behavioral pattern all over again. They hurry from a lap to another.

Continuous zest for life, not willing to be tied to anyone as there is still so much to experience...

A young person's life can be filled with the chaos of love or sexuality (e.g., Beck-Gernsheim & Beck, 1995), where the pleasure and experiences are pursued non-stop by new relationships. Every new conquest is used for strengthening one's self-esteem. It is about a struggle with identity as well: the young want to test through other people what others think of themselves. They want to experience life as a great adventure or continuous experiment (Sperling, 1987).

### *So Much is Included in Love—The Crises and Disappointments as Well*

According to a Finnish proverb, "love takes half of a mind from a wise, all from an insane." The enrapturing symbiotic phase of falling in love lasts between half to one year depending on how intensive the lovers are together and how long time the images can hold it up (Bergman, 1995; Gordon, 2008).

Despite it being enchanting, the early phase of falling in love is temporal and no one can avoid the crises or changes. The fabulous and appealing displays of falling in love inevitably end before long, no matter how happy or satisfying the relationship was by its basis (e.g., Canary & Dainton, 2006). The lovers are no longer satisfied with the hopeful anticipation and amorous illusion of their needs becoming fulfilled; little by little they will also start demanding these promises to come true.

When life becomes back to normal, the new kinds of expectations are aimed at the partner. At the early phase of falling in love, the young concentrate on taking care of the other and being accordant with a partner's expectations but when the relationship becomes stable satisfying one's own needs and selfish demands become more important. The wishes of the one in love can be illustrated in children's words: "I have been good long enough, now it's time for my salary. Now, give me what you promised." The lovers take a real step apart and expect that the dividends of togetherness will start to show profit.

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The change can take place suddenly or step by step but at some point, the partners will notice that their relationship has cooled down. The expressions of love become more infrequent and so does cuddling. Lovers realize they disagree with several matters. The other is not a constant support or cover, nor does love offer just pure pleasure (e.g., Mietzner & Lin, 2005). Instead of being together, the young may start longing for space.

Maybe it was that we spend way too much time just together.

The phase of crises produces disappointments, helplessness, and insecurity. The difficulties the partners confront are the same with which they have to struggle in their intimate relationship all the time, from year to year and from decade to decade (e.g., Dindia & Emmers-Sommer, 2006; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

### *Losing Dreams Hurts*

When lovers get to know each other better, they notice features in each other that they had not noticed before. The partner is not equivalent to their expectations. Disappointments hurt and some might become distressed. The fear of engaging with a wrong person preys on their mind. The new features in the partner may even be a threat to their own security.

And then I was annoyed by the partner's features to which I hadn't paid attention previously; that you started to search for faults... so that it started to make me a sort of anguished.

The bitterest loss for the one in love is losing the dreams. The future with the partner seemed to be filled with miracles and promises. The relationship was supposed to be the beginning for the great hopes full of love, of which all the pop songs and movies tell about, and which you have waited for and planned to build your life on. All these ideal dreams are collapsing and losing these dreams hurts.

I guess that I then noticed that after all, he isn't that wonderful than I thought.

After the disappointments, one's condition and the whole surrounding world may seem dark and cold. When feeling distressed, one may blame the partner for what has happened. When the partner seems distant and the atmosphere of togetherness cold, the young may find it difficult to come up with functional solutions for the problematic situation. They can choose desperate means of exercising power and try to make the partner be more loving (Foehrenbach & Lane, 1994). They can even hurt the other rather than tell about their worries.

I was bossing and demanding that the things have to be done like I wanted to. I nagged about almost every insignificant thing. He was also different than before; cold, unresponsive, distant. He asked for trouble, deliberately annoyed me.

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The new reality may seem chaotic and full of threats. It is not easy for the young to see through the bad feeling: it is not easy to understand that the other did not really want to hurt you but was not capable of anything else either. No one can focus just on fulfilling others' needs. Accepting one's own inability and insufficiency as well as one's own limitedness is part of the development of human personality. Self-knowledge and strengthening the ego result from tolerating groping, insecurity, and the fear of becoming abandoned.

Love is not easy because when you live with someone you have to compromise and even give up some of your dreams. Maybe you have to give over a piece of yourself but you will get back double its worth.

### *Together and Still Alone*

Falling in love creates yearning for being together constantly and the wish for permanent symbiosis. A crisis erupts when one finds out that the other is not a constant support and cover after all (Person, 2007). The other is not a part of oneself. The young in love may find it intolerable that the partner is not interested in the same things, acts differently than they selves do, and wants to do things alone. Facing the other's dissimilarity causes the fear of being left outside and alone.

I tried so hard to please the other; I tried even if I didn't want to. Then, little by little, I realized that it enchained way too much my life and freedom... demanded something that I was not capable of.

The difficulty in love is that it requires two people to become one but still remain two individuals. The toast of love can turn out to be sweet poison. Love does not necessarily appear as wanted; not by trying nor demanding. Love cannot be enhanced by intimidating and it involves the risk of losing and becoming abandoned: love does not guarantee requited love, trust can lead to disappointment, and confiding may hurt. Love is not always enough.

A proper balance between intimacy and distance should be found in a love affair (Dominigue & Mollen, 2009). Lovers may signal various paradoxical hopes for each other; such as "come near, go away" is one of them. On the one hand, they want their independency and freedom, and on the other hand, they want to conform to the other's expectations. The inconsistency of expectations mystifies (e.g., Pistole, Roberts, & Chapman, 2010). Both partners may think that either they did this or that the solution will not be satisfying.

I had fun to be with her, but I had so much more to experience too. All the new plans came up and the other didn't want to let me go; eventually, the situation became too narrow.

Lovers may find it weird that regardless of appreciating proximity the other or both of them need their privacy from time to time.

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Although I am dating, I need a lot of time for myself, kind of privacy; usually, the partner didn't understand it and thought that I don't care... But I am not me if I'm not allowed to bunch myself up every now and then.

Intimacy is essential in love. Many people find the experiences of symbiosis quite comfortable: you do not have to fight for the admiration of the opposite sex, worry about lonely nights or becoming turned down or blazing quarrels. Despite all this, an excessive intimacy also involves problems.

An excessive need for intimacy may cause convulsive entanglement or adhering to the other; then, one starts to avoid being responsible for oneself as an individual and does not want the other have life of his or her own (Meston & Frohlich, 2003). The world seems to end if the other does not agree in everything or he/she wants to be alone or with other people sometimes.

At its worst, togetherness may turn into an ownership or a subjugating relationship where the other thinks of having the right to shape the other to fit one's own hopes and needs. Then, the thirst for power, jealousy, and desire to own the other and treat him/her as an object are involved.

On the other hand, being too far away may also be damaging – affinity fails to develop. A proper way to combine both intimacy and individuality should be found; however, there is not any general pattern or model for finding this balance. The lovers just have to learn to know how much intimacy both of them can tolerate and how much distance they need. They have to have quite the ability to give space both for the other and themselves so that being apart does not make the intimacy disappear. In this way, they will not lean solely on each other nor anchor themselves to each other.

### *"I Need You"*

For some, love can turn into a need and for others into entanglement or destructive addiction. Despite being so harrowing, sticking to someone means living in a relationship in which it is impossible to live but without it living is impossible as well. This kind of dependency can deceivingly feel like love. However, the determining feeling is fear—fear of becoming abandoned, left alone, and that you do not exist without the other.

I think that I'm nothing without him.

The price for love can be high. The traditional conceptions may rule: you have to struggle and be able to carry on, but you are not allowed to quit. The doubt whether the relationship could even be something more is preying on mind. Young people can compare their own relationship with others' relationships in their thoughts and wonder if the others have it any better than they selves do. Should you be satisfied with the prevailing situation or could life alone be better? Those who live in a harrowing relationship remember from time to time the good moments together;

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and again, there is something to deliberate: whether we should still try, whether the partner is able to change, and could the good time they had at the beginning come back.

I waited all the time that the great time we used to have would come back, all the sweetness we experienced.

The one who treats the partner badly is also able to soothe and act in a way that the partner blindly believes that the other will change and be good.

All the unpleasant things in a relationship can be interpreted for the best and togetherness can be constructed by hoping positive changes. Caring about the partner even when he/she is quite troublesome can be understood as a salient and binding part of love.

I think that I can't leave him, how can he handle it?

Belief in the magnificent power of love can make one tolerate mistreatment: the troublesome features are thought to be only temporary.

#### DISCUSSION

Young people of today may have unreasonable expectations toward love: love is seen as an answer and solution to almost all problems they have (e.g., Twenge & King, 2005). Love is considered as the most important source for personal coping and pleasure. The young learn to expect that love heals and makes things easier, removes all the obstacles to happiness, makes their own deficiencies and flaws disappear, and offers the perfect pleasure. The higher are expectations, the greater are disappointments. Dreams turn into a trap if they consist of hopes that cannot be fulfilled by any means. Instead of making life easier, love can actually hurt. How could we support the young when they try to create permanent intimate relationships? Falling in love is also a learning experience for the young people. When dating and falling in love they search, test, and assess themselves and others. They learn about their inner reality, those things that please them and hurt them. At the same time, they increase their awareness and understanding not only about the separateness between their own and others' feelings and expectations but also about the dissimilarity between them. Consequently, falling in love is often a climax in life, a certain turn of events, or border crossing where life and one's own self are formed in a new way.

Learning to appreciate the self can be the way to cherish human relationships. To be able to love the other, one has to love oneself as well. The ability to love requires that one accepts one's own self and uniqueness. In this sense, love is a space where the relationship with the other is not in priority but the relationship with the self is. If one is capable of appreciating oneself, one can appreciate one's decisions and defend them by respecting the other's dissimilarity and individuality. When loving oneself, one can accept one's own good and bad sides and find it easier to have

#### THE SWEET POISON OF LOVE IN ADOLESCENCE AND EARLY ADULTHOOD

the same attitude toward the partner—and will not expect the partner to be perfect either.

But how can young people learn to accept themselves? How can one learn to respect oneself as is without asking for evidence from others? Self-appreciation is enhanced by learning to enjoy one's own success and achievements instead of clinging to others. Everyone has their own fields of expertise and competencies. Studying, work, friends, recreation, and relaxation in the midst of various hobbies, artistic and operational activities provide the youth with opportunities of success and content for life. When having many fields of know-how and sources for satisfaction, one understands better that love is not the answer to everything and one does not expect having non-stop proof or guarantees of love.