

To Love and Work

Romantic and Occupational Identity in Early Adulthood

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Psykologiska institutionen, 2024

Avhandlingen för avläggande av filosofie doktorexamen i psykologi, som med vederbörligt tillstånd av samhällsvetenskapliga fakultetsstyrelsen vid Göteborgs universitet kommer att offentligens försvaras fredagen den 16 februari 2024, klockan 13.00 i Europasalen, Konferenscentrum Wallenberg, Medicinaregatan 20A, Göteborg.

Fakultetsopponent: Jennifer Lilgendahl, Associate Professor of Psychology, Haverford College, USA

Föreliggande uppsats grundar sig på följande artiklar:

- I. Järdmo, C., Eriksson, P. L., & Friséén, A. (2024). Finding one's occupational path – Identity content in repeated narratives across early adulthood. *Submitted manuscript*.
- II. Järdmo, C., Eriksson, P. L., Malm, I., McLean, K. C., & Friséén, A. (2023). Creating something new from past experiences – The meaning of change in repeated narratives. *Journal of Personality, 91*(6), 1294–1313. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12807>
- III. Järdmo, C., Friséén, A., & Wängqvist, M. (2023). Experiences of romantic relationships among early adults who do not turn to their long-term partner when in need of love and support. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology, 64*, 133–141. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjop.12878>



Abstract

Caroline Järdmo (2024). To Love and Work – Romantic and Occupational Identity in Early Adulthood.

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The general aim of this thesis was to explore aspects of identity in early adulthood, namely occupation and romantic relationships, in the cultural context of Sweden in the 21st century. Studies I and II examined narratives about occupational experiences, which were repeated across interview occasions in early adulthood. **Study I** investigated which occupational experiences continued to be part of the occupational identity across early adulthood. Participants repeated narratives that concerned: the birth of an interest that led to occupational orientation; outcomes of exploration; having a compass for occupational direction; passively ending up in an occupation and external influence on occupational choices. **Study II** investigated the meaning of change in repeated occupational narratives across early adulthood. The results showed that, over time, early adults changed their repeated narratives about their occupational identity into stories about gained insights, transformed views on past challenges, increased agency and motivation for occupation, and accentuated competence. While Studies I and II investigated narrative identity concerning occupational experiences, **Study III** focused on romantic relationships. This study explored romantic identity content among 12 early adults, who were in long-term relationships but did not select their partner as the most important person to them when they needed love and support. The results showed that these early adults' everyday experiences of romantic relationships were characterized by ambivalence, a strive for independence, and relating to their partner as a person to have fun with. Participants also expressed disagreement with what they perceived as norms concerning romantic relationships in Swedish society. Study III thus shows that these early adults had a complex approach to relational norms, whereby they followed the norm of being in a long-term relationship while expressing distance regarding romantic relationships.

To conclude, the three studies in this thesis highlight the impact of cultural context, social roles, and the individual's everyday experiences on two of the most important aspects of identity in early adulthood – love and work. By studying individuals' repeated narratives and accounts of their own experiences across early adulthood, we can better understand how identity is complex, continuous, and changing at this time in life.

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