To Love and Work

Romantic and Occupational Identity in Early Adulthood

Caroline Järdmo

Doctoral Dissertation in Psychology
Department of Psychology
University of Gothenburg
February 16, 2024

Cover pictures:
Göteborg 2014 Röda sten
Adapted from Wikimedia Commons, by Jolliro (Kerstin Namuth), 2014-07-31, CC BY-SA 3.0 DEED, Cropped image,
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:G%C3%B6teborg2014_R%C3%B6da_Sten.jpg

Göteborg Skansen Kronan
Adapted from Wikimedia Commons, by Andrzej O (Andrzej Otrębski), 2012-05-29, CC BY-SA 3.0 DEED, Cropped image, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Goteborg_Skansen_Kronan_1.jpg

Gothenburg Tramways [Göteborgs spårvägar]
Adapted from Wikimedia Commons, by Spoorjan (Jan Oosterhuis), 2007-07-25, CC BY-SA 3.0 DEED, Cropped image,
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:G%C3%B6teborgs_Sp%C3%A5rv%C3%A4gar_AB_tram_738%2B813.JPG

Gustav II Adolf
Adapted from Wikimedia Commons, by Gigik, 2011-04-24, CC BY-SA 3.0 DEED, Cropped image,
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gustav_II_Adolf4946.jpg

Lisebergstornet Göteborg
Adapted from Wikimedia Commons, by MBargo (Matthew Bargo), 2010-07-17, CC BY-SA 3.0 DEED, Cropped image,
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lisebergstornet_goteborg_sweden_20100717.jpg

Masthugget Church [Masthuggskyrkan]
Adapted from Wikimedia Commons, by Arild Vågen, 2014-05-27, CC BY-SA 4.0 DEED, Cropped image, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Masthuggskyrkan_September_2014_05.jpg

Oscar Fredrik Church [Oscar Fredriks kyrka]
Adapted from Wikimedia Commons, by Florent Pécassou [Florent Abel], 2023-08-10, CC BY-SA 4.0 DEED, Cropped image,
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Oscar_Fredriks_kyrka_%28G%C3%B6teborg%29.jpg

Poseidon statue in Gothenburg [Poseidonstatyn i Göteborg]
Adapted from Wikimedia Commons, by Historiker, 2012-09-05, CC BY-SA 3.0 DEED, Cropped image,
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Poseidonstatyn_i_G%C3%B6teborg_02.JPG

Seaman's Tower [Sjömanstornet]
Adapted from Wikimedia Commons, by Rolf B (Rolf Broberg), 2006-12-16, CC BY-SA 3.0 DEED, Cropped image, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sjomanstornet_Gbg.jpg

Cover Layout: Caroline Järdmo and Stema Specialtryck
Printing: Stema Specialtryck AB, Borås, Sweden, 2024
ISBN: 978-91-8069-593-0 (Print)
ISBN: 978-91-8069-594-7 (PDF)
ISSN: 1101-718X Avhandling/Göteborgs universitet, Psykologiska institutionen
http://hdl.handle.net/2077/79392

SVANENMÄRKET
Trycksak
3041 0234

Whatever "in love" means.
Prince Charles, 1981
(The Royal Family Channel, 2022)

A work well done provides an inner satisfaction and is the foundation on which society rests.
From "Sagan om Karl-Bertil Jonssons julafton"
(Danielsson, 1984)

Abstract

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. In order to explore narrative identity concerning occupation, Studies I and II examined narratives about occupational experiences, which were repeated across interview occasions by 59 early adults (ages 25, 29, and 33). Study I investigated identity content in the repeated narratives to determine which 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 occupational exploration; having a compass for occupational direction; and passively ending up in an occupation. They also repeatedly narrated about external influence on their occupational choices. This study thus illustrates which experiences continue to be part of the occupational identity across early adulthood. Study II, in order to investigate the meaning of change in narrative identity concerning occupation, examined how repeated narratives changed 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, and increased agency. Participants also added content that accentuated their competence and showed how their motivation for their present occupation had increased. Thus, the findings show how narrators create something new from their past experiences in order to continue to make sense of their lives. 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, aged 33, 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 rather than someone to share a deep connection 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, who did not consider their long-term partner the most important person to them when in need of love and support, had a complex approach to relational norms, whereby they followed the norm of being in a long-term relationship while in different ways 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.

Sammanfattning (Swedish Summary)

Identitet är något som berör alla människor, eftersom de flesta någon gång i livet kommer att ställa frågorna ”Vem är jag?”, ”Varför blev jag så här?” och ”Vem kommer jag att vara i framtiden?”. Identitet ett centralt begrepp i Eriksons psykosociala teori om livslång utveckling och innebär en känsla av att vara samma person över tid och i olika situationer. Det innebär att även om jag nu är 37 år kan jag ändå känna igen mig i den 17-åring jag var då och se denna person i den 57-åring jag föreställer mig att jag kommer att vara om 20 år. Även om jag inte beter mig på samma sätt i min roll som mamma som jag gör när jag är med min partner eller i min yrkesroll så kan både jag och andra uppfatta att jag är samma person. Identitetsutvecklingen sker därför både över tid och inom olika livsområden. Erikson ansåg att två av de viktigaste områdena i livet är att älska och arbeta, och dessa två områden har visat sig vara av speciell betydelse för identiteten under de tidiga vuxenåren. Perioden tidiga vuxenår sträcker sig mellan ca 18 och 40 år, och är viktig för såväl identitetsutforskande, bl.a. gällande områden som utbildning, yrke, romantiska relationer och föräldraskap, som för att utvärdera och implementera de identitetsrelaterade val man har gjort tidigare

Även om formandet av identiteten börjar redan i ungdomsåren, fortsätter personer i tidiga vuxenåren att utforska olika roller för att hitta sin plats i samhället. Att identiteten fortsätter att utvecklas i vuxen ålder har bekräftats i studier som bland annat har visat på att självkännedomen ökar under hela livet. Andra studier visar att även identitetsinnehåll, det vill säga de erfarenheter, roller, attityder och uppfattningar som en individ har, fortsätter att utvecklas livet ut. Ett sätt att studera utvecklingen av identitetsinnehåll är att analysera innehållet i upprepade narrativ om identitet, för att på så sätt komma fram till vad i identitetsinnehållet som ändras och vad som förblir sig likt över tid.

Antalet studier av upprepade narrativ har ökat på senare år, dock saknas det studier som undersöker innehållet i narrativ som upprepas under tidig vuxenålder och som har betydelse för identiteten, samt vad förändring i upprepade narrativ kan betyda för identitetsutvecklingen.

En annan central aspekt av identitetsutvecklingen i tidiga vuxenåren är formandet av identiteten i relation till en romantisk partner. I det tidiga vuxenlivet blir relationen med en romantisk partner viktig för många och de som är i långvariga relationer kan behöva samordna sin individuella livsplan med sin partners. Det innebär för många att de behöver kompromissa med sin partner för att skapa en balanserad relation och samtidigt upprätthålla sin självkänsla och integritet, vilket kan ge en möjlighet att ytterligare definiera och artikulera vem de är och vad de vill. Att se sig själv i sin partners ögon och få ett nytt perspektiv på vem man är kan också bidra till identitetsutvecklingen. Tidigare forskning har även visat att trots att den romantiska partnern har betydelse för identiteten för många i tidig vuxenålder, finns det individer som inte betraktar sin långvariga partner som den viktigaste personen när de är i behov av kärlek och stöd. Det saknas studier som fokuserar på hur dessa individer tänker kring relationer, något som kan behövas för att få förståelse för olika vägar för identitetsutveckling gällande romantiska relationer i tidiga vuxenåren.

Det övergripande syftet med denna avhandling är att utforska två aspekter av identitet i tidig vuxenålder i den svenska kulturella kontexten under tidigt 2000-tal, nämligen yrke och romantiska relationer. Studierna i avhandlingen ingår i forskningsprojektet Gothenburg Longitudinal study of Development (GoLD), som har följt samma individer från barndom (1–2 år) till tidig vuxenålder (38 år). De tre studierna bygger på intervjuer med deltagarna när de var 25, 29 och 33 år.

Studie I och II undersökte upprepade narrativ om yrkesidentitet som berättats av individer i tidiga vuxenåren, för att belysa narrativ identitet i en

yrkeskontext. Studie I fokuserar på innehållet i upprepade narrativ om yrkesidentitet, för att utröna vilka erfarenheter som fortsätter vara en viktig del av den narrativa yrkesidentiteten. Av de 118 personer som intervjuats med Marcias Identitetsstatusintervju i GoLD-projektet vid tre datainsamlingar i tidiga vuxenåren (vid 25, 29 och 33 års ålder) valdes hälften, det vill säga 59 personer, slumpmässigt ut till Studie I. Den del av intervjun som handlade om yrkesidentitet undersöktes för att identifiera narrativ och upprepade narrativ i intervjuerna. Upprepade narrativ är berättelser om samma händelse som berättats vid minst två och som mest tre av tre intervjutillfällen. Analysen av de upprepade narrativen (N = 142) resulterade i fem teman som beskrev vilka erfarenheter som fortsätter vara en viktig del av yrkesidentiteten: hur ett intresse föds, resultatet av att utforska yrkesvägar, att ha en inre kompass gällande yrkesval, och att passivt hamna på en yrkesväg. Deltagarna upprepade även narrativ om yttre påverkan på yrkesvalet. Sammantaget visar Studie I på vilka erfarenheter som fortsätter vara en viktig del av yrkesidentiteten genom tidiga vuxenår. Studie II undersökte hur upprepade narrativ om yrkesidentitet förändrades under tidig vuxenålder. Studien bygger på de upprepade narrativ (N = 142) som identifierades i Studie I. Då syftet med Studie II var att undersöka betydelsen av förändring i upprepade narrativ under tidig vuxenålder, analyserades de upprepade narrativ som innehöll förändringar med betydelse för identiteten (n = 39). Analysen visade på fem teman som belyste hur deltagarna utvecklade berättelsen om sin yrkesidentitet genom att ändra narrativet så det handlade om ökade insikter om sin yrkesidentitet, förändrade synsätt på svåra händelser, och ökad handlingskraft. De lade även till innehåll som framhävde den egna kompetensen och som visade hur motivationen för det nuvarande yrket hade ökat. Sammantaget visade resultaten från denna studie att det inte bara är narrativet som förändras, utan att även narrativets betydelse för yrkesidentiteten, ändras.

Studie III utforskade identitetsinnehåll rörande romantiska relationer för individer i tidiga vuxenår som befann sig i långvariga relationer men som inte uppgav sin partner som den viktigaste personen när de var i behov av kärlek och stöd. Att det är vanligast att vända sig till sin partner om man har en långvarig relation har visats i flera studier. Genom att studera de som går emot denna relationella norm kan man få förståelse för olika sätt att förhålla sig till romantiska relationer, vilket i sin tur är viktigt för att förstå olika utvecklingsvägar i tidiga vuxenåren. Deltagarna valdes ut utifrån sina svar i ett formulär, WHOTO, där de fyllde i vilka personer (t.ex. partner, mamma, bror, vän) som uppfyllde deras behov av närhet, stöd och tröst. Intervjuer med de deltagare som befann sig i långvariga relationer men som angav sin partner som svar på färre än hälften av påståendena valdes ut till Studie III. Av 94 personer som befann sig i långvariga relationer, var det 12 stycken, 8 män och 4 kvinnor ($M_{ålder}$ = 33.3*; SD* = 0.54), som angav sin partner som svar på färre än hälften av påståendena. Liksom alla deltagare i GoLD-projektet hade dessa intervjuats med Marcias Identitetsstatusintervju och utifrån en analys av innehållet i den del av intervjun som handlade om romantiska relationer identifierades tre huvudteman som beskrev dessa deltagares identitetsinnehåll gällande romantiska relationer: avståndstagande attityder till romantiska relationer, eftersträvansvärda aspekter av romantiska relationer och att inte tänka på romantiska relationer. För många av deltagarna kännetecknades upplevelsen av romantiska relationer av en känsla av ambivalens gällande romantiska relationer. De betonade sin självständighet och var kritiska till normer som finns i samhället gällande romantiska relationer, som att gifta sig och hålla ihop resten av livet. Flera uttryckte att en partner var viktig för att bilda familj, men när de pratade om sin egen partner präglades deras uttalanden inte av någon djupare gemenskap med partnern utan snarare av att göra saker tillsammans och dela intressen, och partnern beskrevs som en ”kul kompis att snacka med”. Deltagarna uttryckte också att de inte tänkte så mycket på

romantiska relationer. Studien visade att dessa personer i tidiga vuxenår som inte ansåg att deras långvariga partner var den viktigaste personen när de var i behov av kärlek och stöd hade ett komplext förhållningssätt till relationsnormer, där de följde normen att vara i en långvarig relation samtidigt som de på olika sätt uttryckte distans gentemot romantiska relationer.

Sammantaget, genom att studera upprepade narrativ och berättelser om individens egna upplevelser under tidig vuxenålder, kan vi bättre förstå hur identiteten är komplex, kontinuerlig och föränderlig vid denna tid i livet. De tre studierna i denna avhandling belyser hur kulturell kontext, sociala roller och individens upplevelser påverkar två av de viktigaste aspekterna av identitet i tidig vuxenålder – kärlek och arbete.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As the proverb says, “It takes a village to raise a child”, and I would say the same about writing a thesis. I am deeply thankful for all the support and encouragement I have received from my “village people”.

First and foremost I would like to thank my supervisor, Ann Frisén: Thank you for your valuable patient and steadfast guidance during these years – this thesis could not in any way have been written without you. I also want to thank my associate supervisor, Maria Wängqvist, for her help and encouragement.

I would like to thank my examiner Martin Lövdén, as well as Ulf Axberg and Renee Galliher, for their helpful reviews of the thesis. Furthermore, a thank you to Kate McLean and Moin Syed for sharing their knowledge on identity.

A great thanks to Ann Backlund and Anne Ingeborg Berg for always being supportive and helpful.

To all my colleagues in the Gothenburg group for Research In Developmental psychology (GRID) – Amina Kaafiya Abdullahi, Sofia Berne, Margareta Bohlin, Jonas Burén, Johanna Carlsson, Aziz-Kaan Dönmez, Bo Helsing, Kristina Holmqvist Gattario, Carolina Lunde, Ebba Magnusson, Tommy Reinholdsson, David Sandberg, Therése Skoog, Pär Stern, and Sabina Vlasman – thank you so much for all the interesting discussions as well as the feedback, friendship, and fika. An especially big thanks to my collaborators, Py Liv Eriksson and Ida Malm. I am also grateful to Johanna Kling and Fanny Gyberg for always keeping their door open, and to former GRID Johan Lidberg for our conversations about research and revolution. A profound thank you goes to my roommates in Lugnets sköte – Gustaf Glavå, Andrea Karlsson Valik, and Hanna Larsson – who know the PRISE of the GoLDen ICON.

To my former roommate Isac Sehlstedt, thank you for all the knowledge you shared on statistics and working out. I would also like to thank Erika

Winberg och Besima Softic for their company in the early mornings at the institution.

I am truly grateful to everyone who has been involved in the GoLD project: the project's founders, Professors C. Philip Hwang and Michael Lamb; the members of the project group who assisted with the data collections; and especially the participants, for their contributions to this longitudinal study. Thanks also to the Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare, who funded this research.

To everyone at Göteborgs Ju-Jutsuklubb, thanks for the pleasure and pain and for making me harder, better, faster, stronger.

Thanks to the children, parents, and staff at Naturförskolan Solen, who have made my life so much brighter in recent years.

To Sara Andersson and Linnéa Söderberg, thank you for being part of my past, present, and hopefully future.

A big thank you goes to Jens and Danne Lundsbye, and Rebecca Järdmo Brandt, for their invaluable help in translating Gothenburgian into English and for being generally awesome. That also goes for Annika Järdmo, who is simply the best.

To my very much beloved family, thank you – to Alve and Saga for letting me be an observer on your paths into early adulthood, and to Eje and Vidar for reminding me what's important in life.

Finally, to Håkan, for your endless support, loyalty, and sharing of insights – thank you for everything!

List of Publications

This thesis consists of a summary of the following three papers, referred to in the text by their Roman numerals:

I. Järdmo, C., Eriksson, P. L., & Frisén, 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., & Frisén, 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., Frisén, 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

The studies were financially supported by a grant from the Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare (FORTE) awarded to Professor Ann Frisén, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

Content

Introduction

The concept of identity refers to something that concerns all individuals, as most of us at some point in our lives ask the question "Who am I?". Identity was defined as a notion that "I am me", a sense of sameness across time and situations, by Erik H. Erikson (1950) in his highly influential psychological theory of identity development (Syed & McLean, 2018; Schwartz et al., 2013). According to Erikson (1950), two of the most important aspects of life are to love and to work; and the importance of love and work for identity in general, and in early adulthood in particular, has been confirmed in several studies (Kroger et al., 2010; Fadjukoff et al., 2005; McLean et al., 2016; Crocetti et al., 2012; Vosylis et al., 2018). The early years of adulthood are also an important developmental period for identity, involving exploring as well as reviewing and implementing identity decisions one has made earlier in life (Arnett, 2012; Waterman, 1993). While identity formation starts in the developmental stage of adolescence, theory holds that young adults continue to explore different roles to find their place in society (Erikson, 1968; 1980). The idea that identity continues to develop in adulthood has been confirmed in research, which has shown a growing certainty of identity along with greater self-knowledge throughout the adult years (Kroger, 2015). Previous studies (e.g., Eriksson et al., 2020b) have also shown that it is often the content of one's identity that develops in early adulthood. The development of identity content has also been seen in research on repeated narration that studies narrative identity development (e.g., McLean et al., 2019). However, there is a lack of studies investigating identity content in narratives that are repeated over early adulthood or the meaning of change in repeated narratives.

Another central aspect of identity development is relationships with close others (Erikson, 1950). In early adulthood, relationships with romantic partners become highly important to many; and when in a long-term relationship, individuals often work with sustaining their sense of self while at the same time making compromises with their partner in order to create a balanced relationship, which may contribute to identity development (Shulman & Connolly, 2014). Despite the importance of the romantic partner for identity for many in early adulthood, little research has focused on the identity of individuals who do not consider their long-term partner the most important person to them when in need of love and support.

The overall 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. Study I investigated which experiences continue to be part of the occupational identity across early adulthood, while Study II investigated the meaning of change in narrative identity by examining how repeated narratives concerning occupation changed across early adulthood. Study III explored romantic identity content among early adults in long-term relationships who did not select their partner as the most important person to them when they needed love and support.

The first section of the thesis begins with a presentation of Erikson's theory on identity development (Erikson, 1950; 1968), and goes on to introduce theory and frameworks for identity research based on this theory. These are narrative identity theory (McAdams, 1993; 2001) as well as the study of repeated narration (Adler, 2019) and identity content (Galliher et al., 2017). The final part of the first section introduces two of the important identity domains of early adulthood – the occupational and the romantic domains.

The second section concerns the developmental period of early adulthood, with special focus on the Swedish context in relation to occupation and romantic relationships.

In the final part, after a brief presentation of the three studies, the main results from the studies will be discussed, including a discussion of identity in early adulthood as well as the methodological and ethical aspects of the studies, before the conclusions of the thesis are drawn.

Identity

In order for me to understand myself, and my place in time and in the world, I must answer the essential question "Who am I?". The search for an identity can be seen as a driving force in its own right, as "there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of ego identity" (Erikson, 1980, p. 95). This thesis aims to explore aspects of identity in early adulthood, more specifically occupation and romantic relationships, in the cultural context of Sweden in the 21st century. This is done with the help of two perspectives on identity, narrative identity theory and identity content, which are presented in this section of the thesis. However, as both have their origin in Erikson's theory of identity, this will be the section's starting point.

Erikson's Theory of Identity

The development of an identity is a central concept in Erikson's psychosocial theory of life span development (Syed & McLean, 2018). In this theory, development occurs in eight stages, each with a separate developmental crisis to be solved. Each stage also builds on the resolution of crises from the former stages, and is then elaborated throughout one's life (Erikson, 1980). For example, the sense of an individual identity originates from the interplay between the infant and its primary caregiver in the first developmental stage, Trust vs. Mistrust, during which the small child is recognized as a separate person by its caregiver (Erikson, 1968). This sense of being an individual is elaborated throughout the stages of childhood, until adolescence and the developmental stage Identity vs. Identity Diffusion (Erikson, 1980). In adolescence, individuals have reached a stage at which both biological changes (such as puberty) and societal pressure (such as expectations that one should

decide what to do with one's life) force the young person to consider different roles and integrate various identifications into a more complete identity (Erikson, 1980). Erikson's theory (1950) defines identity as a feeling of sameness and continuity across time (past, present, and future) and situations (social roles), and that this sameness is recognized by significant others. The concept of identity involves several parts: first, identity development, which is the process of figuring out who one is and who one wants to be; second, the actual content – such as roles, experiences, goals, attitudes, and beliefs – that makes up one's identity and answers the question "Who am I?" (e.g., woman, mother, socialist, Beatles fan, psychologist, agnostic); third, the structure of how the different parts of one's identity relate to each other (e.g., how one's work, romantic relationship, and parenthood affect each other, or how one handles the different identities of being both gay and deeply religious) (Erikson, 1950). As for the process of identity development, the positive resolution of the identity crises entails understanding and accepting oneself, as well as being acknowledged and accepted by significant others (Erikson, 1968). However, an identity crisis is never resolved once and for all, as the development of identity is a lifelong developmental task as the sense of identity "is constantly lost and regained" (Erikson, 1980, p. 127). This means that, even after the identity crisis in adolescence is resolved, crises can re-emerge in the other developmental stages, with some identity decisions remaining while others are abandoned (Erikson et al., 1986). Research on identity development in adulthood has shown a growing certainty of identity along with greater self-knowledge throughout the adult years (Kroger, 2015), and this development seems to take place in different parts of life, or identity domains, at different times across adulthood (Fadjukoff et al., 2005).

Erikson's theory of identity has been criticized for being vague and complex (Syed & McLean, 2018). There are also claims that his lectures and presentations were more direct than his writings, and that he deliberately wrote

in an abstract way to prevent readers from losing the full meaning of his concepts, such as that of identity as a feeling of sameness and continuity (Hoare, 2002). The original theory has been further developed into other theories on identity, such as the theory of narrative identity (McAdams, 1993; 2001) and models that operationalize identity for the purpose of systematic and scientific studies, such as the identity status model (Marcia, 1966; Marcia et al., 1993) and the integrated model for studying identity content (Galliher et al., 2017). In this thesis, Studies I and III focus on identity content in repeated narratives concerning occupation (Study I) and in everyday experiences of romantic relationships (Study III), while Study II is informed by the theory of narrative identity, presented below.

Narrative Identity

Based on Erikson's theory of identity, McAdams (1993; 2001) created a model for narrative identity to describe how individuals often turn to the well-known narrative format in their understanding of themselves and development of an identity. According to narrative identity theory the human world is a world of storytelling, with humans telling each other about events that have happened and how they are related to both what happened before and what happens next (McAdams, 1993; Pettersson & Osvaldsson Cromdal, 2020). Through a process of selective reconstruction of memories, individuals create a coherent integration of experiences, making sense of the past, present, and imagined future (McAdams, 2011). This process starts in late adolescence and the early adult years as a function of both a maturation of formal operational thinking and societal expectations regarding identity, thus helping in the search for an answer to the key identity questions "Who am I?", "Where did I come from?", and "Where is my life going?" (McAdams, 2011). Once the process of developing a narrative identity has begun, it continues throughout the life

course as more experiences are formulated as personal narratives and are integrated into the narrative identity (McAdams & McLean, 2013). However, it is not only new experiences that are integrated into the narrative identity; across adulthood, individuals continue to reinterpret their understandings of themselves and change their perspectives on who they were, are, and may be in their future identities. These processes give the individuals' lives a sense of unity, purpose, and meaning (McAdams & McLean, 2013). The following sections present the construction of the narrative identity through autobiographical reasoning, the role of personal narratives, and the role of repeated narration for narrative identity. These parts of the narrative identity are all important parts both of Study I, which investigated which experiences continue to be part of the narrative identity concerning occupation across early adulthood, and of Study II, in which the meaning of change in narrative identity was investigated by examining how repeated narratives concerning occupation changed across early adulthood.

Autobiographical Reasoning

How a coherent and continuous sense of self is formed through specific personal narratives about remembered events from one's past is a question that has intrigued many psychologists. According to Prebble et al. (2013), the answer is the autobiographical memory – the knowledge that we are the same person now as in the past is due to our remembrance of being the same person. The life narrative, the most abstract level of knowledge structure for the autobiographical memory, integrates the autobiographical memory and sense of self on the most complex cognitive level (Conway, 2005). The process of transforming memories into life narratives is called autobiographical reasoning, and is concepted as the ability to make connections between the experiences of one's past and present and different aspects of the self, as well

as the emotional evaluation of these connections (Habermas & Köber, 2015; McLean & Fournier, 2008), creating autobiographical meaning (Peters et al., 2022). Without this process, memories are unrelated events that lack a sense of meaning or importance for the individual. Autobiographical reasoning is a gradual process that involves the repetition and processing of highly specific and concrete memories into more abstract summaries, which provides distance from and perspective on specific life events as well as a sense of continuity (Prebble et al., 2013). How specific memories can be conceptualized into personal narratives is presented below.

Personal Narratives

An individual's narrative identity consists of a great number of personal narratives about events that have occurred throughout their life. These personal narratives present the individual's experiences, localized in time and space. Although there is no universal definition of what constitutes a personal narrative, it should contain information on "experiences of specific life events that unfold over time" (Adler et al., 2017, p. 521). In order to analyze narratives about personal experiences, Labov and Waletzky (1967) proposed a narrative analytical framework, in which a narrative is constituted by five sections: 1) orientation, 2) complication, 3) evaluation, 4) resolution, and 5) coda. A personal narrative typically begins with orienting information that introduces the person and other characters, and locates the event in time and place. The orientation is followed by a complicating action that provides the series of events that comprise the actual plot of the narrative. The evaluation appears throughout the event, expressed as the thoughts or feelings of, or meaning made by, the narrator. The resolution marks what ultimately happened – in other words the result of the complication – and is sometimes followed by a

coda that signals the end by returning to the present. An example (from Study II): “It might have been when I was about 14 (orientation). There was a small box in the Science Hall, and it said that if you recycle this and that many tons of paper you save this and that many trees, and since I’m a bit economic I thought it was damned stupid to throw it in the waste bin, so the environmental interest came in that situation (complication). I remember, yes, it’s a bit funny (evaluation) that it was such an event that started it (resolution). So yes, that’s how it was (coda)”. Labov and Waletzky (1967) created this structural model because they considered the narrative to be a method for summarizing personal experiences. There is also a relationship between a narrative’s structure and content in which they affect each other; that is, what a person narrates is influenced by how they narrate, and vice versa (Pettersson & Osvaldsson Cromdal, 2020). Both the content and structure of specific narratives constitute the individual’s narrative identity (Fivush et al., 2019; Singer, 2019). However, as the same narrated events might hold different meanings at different times in a person’s life, parts of the narrative identity need to be modified over the life course (Josselson, 2009). Therefore, the continuous development of narrative identity may help one achieve an evolving, yet congruent, understanding of self over time (McAdams, 2018). How this development of the narrative identity may be captured through repeated narration will be further described in the next section.

Repeated Narration

Repeated narration is defined as the repetition of similar content across different occasions several weeks or years apart (Adler, 2019). Asking individuals to tell their life story at several different occasions offers the possibility to study how their narrative identity has developed by examining

what parts of their life story are the same and what parts have changed. Research on repeated narration builds on the assumption that, in order for a person to maintain their identity as a subjective coherent sense of self, their identity also needs to be reworked and developed throughout life in response to new experiences (Erikson, 1968; McAdams, 2013). Continuously developing one's narrative identity may thereby help one achieve an evolving but cohesive understanding of self as time goes on (McAdams, 2018). While narrative stability may give the individual a sense of self-continuity (e.g., Köber & Habermas, 2017; McAdams et al., 2006), a systematic and meaningful change in the narrative often represents growth and development (McAdams, 2019). However, in the study of repeated narration, the relationship between stability and change is complex. For instance, for some narrators the repetition of a narrative may generate a more solidified life story and accomplish a sense of continuity within the self (McAdams & McLean, 2013). For other narrators, repeated narration may reflect a lack of working through their narrative identity (Syed & Azmitia, 2010) and may also constrain their personal development, since the longer a story has been around, the harder it might be to change it (McLean, 2017). Longitudinal research on narrative identity has also shown that when people do not repeat previous events in their narratives, this can be a function of changed life circumstances or changes in the context in which the narrative is told (McAdams, 2019). In addition, research has shown that narratives that were not repeated during follow-up interviews had been deselected because they were considered irrelevant to the individual's current narrative identity and were replaced by more important life events (Camia & Habermas, 2020). In most previous research on repeated narration, stability is conceptualized as repeating an event in one's life story while change is conceptualized as not repeating an event and instead replacing it with another (e.g., Adler, 2019). Although there has been some research concerning the repetition of specific events, it has involved either a highly

limited number of participants (e.g., Adler, 2019) or a focus on calculating narrative stability over time (e.g., Köber & Habermas, 2017) instead of examining the actual content of the stable narratives. In order to capture continuity in narrative identity development, Study I conducted a qualitative investigation in a large community sample involving the identity content of early adults' repeated occupational narratives in order to discern which experiences continued to be part of the occupational identity across early adulthood.

Concerning change, to my knowledge there are four studies to date that partly address the meaning of this aspect in repeated narration. Two of these are case studies, one (Josselson, 2009) focusing on how one memory appeared in the repeated narration of a woman across her college years and up to her fifties, and one (McLean et al., 2019) describing changes in the repeated narratives of a woman in midlife. Both studies show that it is not only the content of the repeated narration that changes but also the meaning of the repeated narratives for one's present identity. Another study (Patterson et al., 2022) of college-attending emerging adults narrating their transition to college showed that change in their repeated narration was associated with a deeper understanding of the meaning of the transition when reflecting on experiences involving mental health and marginalization. Finally, a study (Peters et al., 2022) that included a community sample of individuals ranging from adolescence to late adulthood who narrated their lives twice with four years between the narrations tested the influence of age, personality traits, and event characteristics on changes in autobiographical meaning. This study found more change in autobiographical meaning the more an individual was open to experience, the more recently the events had happened, and the more negative emotions were mentioned. All four studies are important, as they illustrate that the meaning of past experiences may change when the experiences are retold. However, there are limitations in all of the studies when it comes to

understanding the meaning of change in repeated narratives: While case studies like Josselson (2009) and McLean et al. (2019) are important for illustrating complex phenomena, there is a need for studies that include more than one participant in order to capture the bigger picture. Meanwhile, the study by Patterson et al. (2022) included a large number of participants but concerned a highly specific context, the transition to college. Although the study by Peters et al. (2022) included a community sample, the focus was on the relationship between change and characteristics of the narrators and the events rather than on the meaning that change in repeated narration can have for identity. As far as I know, there are no studies that specifically focus on investigating how change is manifested in repeated narratives within a community sample in order to explore the meaning of these changes for the narrators' identity. Therefore, Study II investigated the meaning of change in narrative identity in a large community sample, by examining how repeated narratives concerning occupation changed across early adulthood.

Identity Content

Identity content is the constituent elements that make up identity – thus the roles, experiences, goals, attitudes, and beliefs that answer the question "Who am I?". Until rather recently, the concept of identity content had remained relatively unexplored and lacked an overall definition (Syed & McLean, 2015). In 2017, however, Galliher, McLean, and Syed presented a model for analyzing and describing four levels of identity content, to be used as an organizing tool for studies on identity development. In the model, the broadest level is cultural context, defined as the historical, political, and structural context that affects individuals, both abstractly through norms and expectations as well as concretely through constraints such as laws and discrimination. Whether an individual adheres to or rejects certain norms and

expectations they affect the person's identity, since everyone must in some way relate to them. The next level is social roles, the relational contexts in which identities develop. Although an individual can choose to be a romantic partner, an employee, or a parent, for instance, these roles are explicitly defined in relation to someone else (e.g., partner, employer, or child). Identity domains is the third level of the model, and hitherto the most well explored (e.g., McLean et al., 2016; Wängqvist et al., 2016; Larsson et al., 2020). These domains represent the various life areas that the individual feels are central to their identity, such as considering their occupation or romantic relationship to be important for who they are. Lastly, the everyday experiences make up the proximal level of identity content. An individual's everyday experiences include the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that show what daily life looks like for that person and can help in understanding how the other three levels interact within the person. Although many studies have looked at everyday experiences, few have used the whole model to acknowledge all four levels of identity content (for exceptions, see Currin et al., 2020; Johansen & Varvin, 2020; Johnson et al., 2022; McLean et al., 2019; Mitchell et al., 2018; Rodgers et a 2021; Wong et al., 2022). Most previous research informed by the whole model has concerned ethnic identity (Johansen & Varvin, 2020; Mitchell et al., 2018; Rodgers et al., 2021); sexual minority identity (Currin et al., 2020); religious, sexual, and ethnic identity (Wong et al., 2022); and individual identity (Johnson et al., 2022, McLean et al., 2019). However, to my knowledge no previous studies have focused on occupational or romantic identity. In this thesis, the identity content model (Galliher et al., 2017) is used in Study I to discuss the identity content of early adults' repeated occupational narratives in order to discern which experiences continue to be part of the occupational identity across early adulthood, and in Study III to discuss romantic identity content among early adults in long-term relationships who did not select their partner as the most important person to them when they

needed love and support. As occupational and romantic identity are the life areas that are the most important for identity in early adulthood, they will be presented in the following sections.

Occupational Identity Domain

Identity development in adolescence often begins with thoughts about one's occupation (Erikson, 1968). In order to get and keep a job, people need to balance a reciprocal relationship with society on the one hand and a feeling of continuity within the self on the other, which promotes identity development (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966). The complimentary effect of learning and development due to work has shown that gains in the occupational domain often lead to gains in other domains; for example, feeling competent in one's occupation can lead to psychological well-being that can enrich one's family life (Hoare, 2011). Moreover, occupational identity operates not only as a determinant of occupational choice and attainment but also as a major factor in the meaning and structure of people's lives (Erikson, 1968), and has therefore frequently been conceptualized as a major component of people's overall sense of identity (Kroger et al., 2010; Skorikov & Vondracek, 1998; 2011). In early adulthood most individuals face new life experiences, for example trying different jobs and education programs, and many are settling into adult roles such as starting a stable occupational path (Arnett, 2012). During this time many individuals implement the identity decisions they have made earlier in life, such as applying for work in the area in which they have studied (Arnett, 2012; Waterman, 1993). When individuals find a job they want to keep, they are more likely to become engaged in their work. This might lead to increased responsibilities and a motivation to keep developing along a long-term occupational path (Waterman & Archer, 1993). This often happens

in a person's late twenties along with other serious life commitments, such as committing to a romantic partner in a long-term relationship (Arnett, 2014a). Research has thus shown that late adolescence and early adulthood comprise an important period for occupational identity development, but it is also a starting point for the development of a narrative identity (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Despite the importance of occupation for identity development, there is little research investigating which experiences continue to be part of the occupational identity across early adulthood, and how these experiences may be narrated differently as the person's view of them changes. The few longitudinal qualitative studies with a narrative perspective on how occupational identity develops over time at this age have specifically focused on either mental health (Blank et al., 2015; Korhonen et al. 2020), college or university studies (Patterson et al., 2022; McLean et al., 2022; Mantai, 2019), or occupational and educational transitions (Vaughan & Roberts, 2007; Davey & Arnold, 2000; Simosi et al., 2022; Parada & Salmela-Aro, 2022). However, as far as I know there are no narrative studies on this subject that have taken a broader perspective; therefore, there is a lack of knowledge of how occupational identity develops throughout early adulthood in general, and of what experiences turn out to be important for occupational identity. In this thesis, Study I focuses on occupational experiences that continue to be part of the narrative identity across early adulthood, while Study II focuses on changes in repeated narratives about occupational experiences and the meaning of these changes for narrative identity development.

Apart from occupation, romantic relationships are the most important part of life for many early adults (McLean et al., 2016; Crocetti et al., 2012; Vosylis et al., 2018). This will be further explored in the next section.

Romantic Identity Domain

When a person's sense of identity has been firmly rooted, they can establish real intimacy with others as well as with themselves, as intimacy can be defined as "the ability to fuse your identity with somebody else's without fear that you're going to lose something yourself" (Evans, 1964, p. 48). Although adolescents have relationships, romantic and otherwise, these are based on trying to find their own identity by talking to the other, making confessions about one's feelings and discussing plans, wishes, and expectations; that is, using the other person as a mirror to reflect oneself rather than truly seeing the other person (Erikson, 1968). In Erikson's psychosocial theory of life span development (Erikson, 1950), intimacy versus isolation is the developmental crisis after identity. Intimacy refers not only to sexual intimacy but above all to the ability to have truly reciprocal relationships with others. Failing to succeed in establishing an intimate relationship, with either oneself or others, one becomes isolated or indulges in superficial, stereotypical relationships (Erikson, 1980). While these can be long-lasting, they can never become heartfelt until the person has found themselves. The proposition that relationships with others are important for identity development was further developed through the introduction of the interpersonal identity domain in identity research in order to refine the methods for capturing the salient parts of identity (Grotevant et al., 1982). Since then, the interpersonal domain, which includes romantic relationships, has been shown to be one of the most important domains for identity in early adulthood (McLean et al., 2016), as it is in this phase of life that many people form long-term romantic relationships after a period of exploration in the form of dating and shorter relationships (Arnett, 2014a; Shulman & Connolly, 2014). Romantic identity development consists of several processes. First, individuals explore their values, goals, and

beliefs about romantic relationships (Grotevant et al., 1982; Marcia et al., 1993). Do they want to be in a romantic relationship at all and, if so, what should this relationship look like and how will it affect their life in general (Arnett, 2014a; Shulman & Connolly, 2014)? Second, by engaging in romantic relationships, individuals have both the chance to establish personal views on relationships by learning what they like and dislike in a partner, as well as the possibility to see themselves in the eyes of their partner, thus gaining new perspective on who they are (Arnett, 2014a; Erikson, 1950). Finally, in the mutual process of coordinating one's individual life plan with that of one's partner, individuals must sustain their sense of self and at the same time make compromises with their partner in order to create a balanced relationship, which may provide an opportunity to further define and articulate who they are and what they want (Shulman & Connolly, 2014). While it is not a necessity to commit to an actual relationship in order to commit to values, goals, and beliefs concerning romantic relationships (Grotevant et al., 1982), being in a romantic relationship may contribute to identity development in many ways (Erikson, 1950). However, a long-term relationship not only contributes to an individual's identity development; the relationship with one's romantic partner also develops over time, and most early adults in a long-term romantic relationship turn to their partner when in need of love and support (Spörrle et al., 2010). Hazan and Zeifman (1994) have suggested that there is a qualitative difference between relationships that have lasted more than two years and those of shorter duration. According to this assumption it is the nature of the love and support that are needed that determines who people turn to, and this is influenced by both the person's age and the length of the relationship. Children often prefer to be close to their peers to fulfil needs for closeness and contact but need their parents for emotional support and comfort. As they grow older and reach adolescence, their peers may also fulfil needs for emotional support. For adults, a similar sequence is seen in romantic relationships: The

partner first fulfils needs for closeness and contact and, as the relationship progresses, also fulfils needs for emotional support and comfort. This is more likely to progress in relationships characterized by high levels of mutual trust and caring (Fraley & Davis, 1997). However, what previous studies (e.g. Hazan & Zeifman, 1994; Fraley & Davis, 1997) have also revealed is that there is a group of individuals who are in long-term relationships (i.e., longer than two years) but do not turn to their partner when they need contact, love, or support. To my knowledge, there is no previous research on experiences of romantic relationships among these individuals. This means that there is a gap in the understanding of how romantic experiences develop among individuals who do not follow the norm of turning to one's partner when in need of love and support. In addition to studies concerning development in romantic relationships, there is research showing that individuals with a higher need for independence in relationships generally rate key relational features, such as intimacy and trust, as less important in their romantic relationships compared to individuals who place higher value on being close to others (Ren et al., 2017). Individuals who emphasize independence have also been shown to rate positive consequences as less probable and negative consequences as more probable when thinking of spending time with their partner (Monteolivia et al., 2016). These quantitative studies show that individuals who emphasize independence in relationships and report a low need for closeness have a more negative attitude toward romantic relationships in general and do not see them as important, but it is not clear why. Therefore, Study III aimed to address the gap in the understanding of how romantic experiences develop for individuals who do not follow the norm of turning to one's partner, by exploring romantic identity content among 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.

Development in Early Adulthood

Although Erikson placed identity formation in the developmental stage of adolescence, he also wrote about a prolonged adolescence during which young adults experimented with roles to find their niche in society, as identity is a matter of both biological and psychological development as well as increased societal pressure to find one's place in society (Erikson, 1968; 1980). Indeed, society has changed for early adults in the years since Erikson formed his theory in the 1950s and 60s. The labor market in many developed countries has changed from a manufacturing to a service economy, leading to a higher demand for a highly educated workforce (Arnett, 2014b). In the late 1960s 40% of young Americans enrolled in college, compared to 70% in the 2010s, and while it was possible in the mid-1900s to get a relatively well-paid job in late adolescence with a high-school education or less, many service jobs today require a college or university education and young adults might not find a long-term job until at least their late twenties (Arnett, 2014b; Arnett, 2014c). The same development can be seen in Sweden, where the age of establishment on the labor market (defined as 75% of an age group having a job that pays at least half the median salary of 45-year-olds) has increased from 21 to 28 years since 1987 (Confederation of Swedish Enterprise, 2018). When "Identity – youth and crisis" (Erikson, 1968) was first published in 1968, the average marriage age in the US was 20.8 years for women and 23.1 years for men, while it had risen to 28.6 for women and 30.4 for men by 2021 (United States Census Bureau, 2021). In Sweden the mean age at first marriage – in the late 1960s 23.3 years for women and 25.9 years for men (Statistics Sweden, 2020a) – had risen to 34.7 years for women and 37 years for men by 2021 (Statistics Sweden, 2021). This means that in both work and love, the process of identity

formation that begins in adolescence often continues and intensifies in early adulthood.

Early adulthood is often described as the time between adolescence and middle age (Berk, 2014); however, there is no standardized definition regarding the specific ages this developmental period entails. According to Levinson (1986), early adulthood lasts between the ages of 17 and 45 years, with a transition period of five years into and out of the era, while Berk (2014) places the period between ages 18 and 40 and Kroger (2007) between ages 23 and 39. Furthermore, some researchers have divided early adulthood into two distinct parts. First comes emerging adulthood (ages 18-29), characterized by identity exploration and self-focus, instability, and feeling in-between, but also by possibilities and optimism (Arnett, 2001). The second part, established adulthood (ages 30-45), is characterized by competing work and family responsibilities (Mehta et al., 2020). As this thesis concerns the developmental tasks of figuring out what one wants from life concerning love and work and implementing one's goals, rather than a specific age frame, the term *early adulthood* will be used broadly for the ages 18 to 40 years, in line with Berk's (2014) suggestion. The studies in this thesis more specifically concern the ages 25-33, which is the middle part of early adulthood according to the definition used in this thesis. These years involve the transition between exploration in emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000) and implementation in established adulthood (Mehta et al., 2020). Thus, when I refer to previous research concerning emerging adulthood or established adulthood, I mean the earlier and later periods of early adulthood, respectively. For many individuals, early adulthood means being self-reliant as well as finding their path in life and beginning to walk it. This involves thinking about issues such as education, occupation, romantic relationships, and children, as well as deciding which of these are desirable and how to proceed in order to acquire them (Levinson, 1986; Arnett 2014a). It is impossible to specify the exact time frame and order

of these events – both a 22-year-old man and a 36-year-old man can be a newly trained nurse and father of two, and a 39-year-old woman can be either a first-time parent or a grandmother. Furthermore, previous research has shown that, despite the major role transitions during this period of becoming an adult, the most common conception of the transition to adulthood is based on individualistic character qualities, such as accepting responsibility for one's actions and deciding on one's own beliefs and values (Arnett, 2001). Therefore, early adulthood describes the developmental tasks during these years rather than the actual time frame. Development through early adulthood, leaving the exploration period of one's early to mid-twenties and making commitments in both the occupational and romantic domains, can be highly satisfying in terms of occupational advancement, deeper emotional commitments in love, family life, and the realization of major life goals (Levinson, 1986). Simultaneously, it is a time of great requirements and demands involving the fulfilment of adult roles, especially those concerning work and love (Arnett, 2012; Mehta et al., 2020) – which, according to Erikson (1950), are the two most important areas of human functioning. However, as development is affected not only by individuals' age but also by the culture they live in (Erikson, 1980), the next section concerns early adulthood in Sweden, which is the context of the studies in this thesis.

Being an Early Adult in 21st-Century Sweden

Sweden has been classified as an extreme country when it comes to individualized values (such as secular-rational values) and self-expression (such as prioritizing democracy and equality) (World Values Survey, 2020). In general, Swedes also place less emphasis on religion, traditional family values, and authority compared to people in other countries. As for adulthood, a

majority of Swedes perceive themselves as adults when they reach their thirties (Wängqvist & Frisén, 2016), and by then most are established on the labor market and are planning to start, or have recently started, a family (Statistics Sweden, 2020a; 2019). Although 27% of emerging adults continue to live with their parents, most leave the parental home in their early twenties (Hyresgästföreningen, 2019). Sweden's well-developed social care system enables early adults to become relatively independent from their parents; for example, higher education is free, and students have access to a study allowance and a study loan, which most of them take advantage of (Swedish Board of Student Finance, 2022), meaning that early adults do not have to choose between education and financial independence. Sweden also has a high proportion of women on the labor market in international comparisons. This might be due to individual taxation, a well-developed public care system for children and elderly, as well as parental benefits. However, there is a relatively high degree of gender division on the labor market, with women working more often in the public sector and men in the private sector, which might be due to the simultaneous development during the 20th century of the public sector and women's increased participation on the labor market (Bengtsson & Berglund, 2017). The following sections aim to present a fuller picture of the situation for early adults concerning education and occupation, the Swedish labor market model, and romantic relationships in early adulthood in Sweden.

Education and Occupation in Early Adulthood in Sweden

Swedish compulsory school is a ten-year education, from Class F (*förskoleklass*, preschool class) to Class 9. Children start compulsory school at six years old and finish at 16. The choice of education program for upper secondary school is made in Class 9, deciding among 18 programs of which

six are university preparatory and 12 are work-life preparatory (Skolverket, 2022). For Swedish youth, choosing a program for upper secondary school is their first institutional breaking point and is decisive for a future career (Gruffman, 2010). In reality, upper secondary school is the only available alternative for youth who have completed middle school, and the choice is considered important by 83% of youth (Dresch & Lovén, 2010). As mentioned, the age of establishment on the labor market has increased over the last 35 years and is now 28 years (Confederation of Swedish Enterprise, 2018). One reason for this is the increased number of highly educated individuals in the country. Forty-four percent of Swedes aged 25-65 have a post-upper secondary school education, and 29% of Swedes are considered highly educated, having studied for three or more years at university (Statistics Sweden, 2021). Employment rates in Sweden almost double from the ages 15-24 years (45%) to 25-34 years (82%) (Statistics Sweden, 2019), and early adults without a degree from upper secondary school are overrepresented in unemployment, due to higher demands on the labor market for education (Swedish Public Employment Service, 2018). For this group, it can take five to seven years until they are established on the labor market with a permanent job. The unemployment rate among early adults is altogether higher than among the general population, with 10.5% of early adults being active job seekers (Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society, 2020) and 6.5% neither studying, working, nor looking for work (Statistics Sweden, 2020c). Meanwhile, the unemployment rate among the general population is 8.3% (Statistics Sweden, 2020b). Thus, in Sweden the working conditions in early adulthood can vary greatly across this developmental period, both between individuals and for a single individual. As the structural conditions, such as working conditions or the labor market, can have a great impact on individuals' identities (Galliher et al., 2017), it is important to study identity in its context. In this thesis, Study I investigated the identity content of early adults' repeated

narratives in the Swedish occupational context in order to discern which experiences continue to be part of the occupational identity across early adulthood, while Study II investigated the meaning of change in narrative identity by examining how repeated narratives concerning occupation in the Swedish context changed across early adulthood.

The Swedish Labor Market Model

The labor market that many Swedes enter sometime during early adulthood long deviated within an international perspective. "The Swedish Labor Market Model" ("Den svenska modellen", Bengtsson & Berglund, 2017) was originally characterized by:

1. The right to organize in unions and associations, which is still enshrined in law. This has led to a high degree of organization in trade unions and employer associations that negotiate on a national level.
2. Relatively small wage differences on the labor market, due to a wage politics whereby the employer is required to adjust individual salaries to the national wage norm.
3. A culture of openness and minimization of differences in status, whereby the relationship between management and employees is often characterized by consensus concerning innovation and development.
4. Low unemployment as a prioritized goal in labor politics.

Although the Swedish Labor Market Model has undergone profound changes since the 1990s, the idea of negotiation and consensus between trade unions and employer associations is still strong, as 70% of employees are members of a trade union and 90% work under collective agreement (Bengtsson & Berglund, 2017). However, it is not only within a labor market perspective that Sweden differs from other countries. The next section presents

romantic relationships in early adulthood, another area in which Sweden distinguishes itself from an international point of view.

Romantic Relationships in Early Adulthood in Sweden

Sweden stands out within a European perspective in the area of romantic relationships, having the highest mean age at first marriage (Eurostat, 2021). Research also suggests that marriage in Sweden has come to be separated from tradition and religion, and is viewed as the individual's choice based on practical reasoning (considering, for example, legal or economic issues) or as a symbolic declaration to strengthen and stabilize the romantic couple as a unit (Strandell, 2018; Wängqvist et al., 2016). Cohabiting with a romantic partner and having children without being married is also more common in Sweden compared to the rest of Europe (with the exception of France), due to both laws concerning cohabitation and a general view of it as an acceptable form of family life (Eurofound, 2019; Kiernan, 2004). The norm of being in a long-term romantic relationship is still very strong when it comes to starting a family and raising children (Frisén, et al., 2014), with the lack of a partner being one of the main reasons people cite for not having children (Schytt et al., 2014). However, Swedish early adults in general believe that romantic relationships are an important part of life (Wängqvist et al., 2016) and a majority of people in their early thirties are involved in such a relationship (Statistics Sweden, 2018). Although there has been some research on what romantic relationships mean for early adults in Sweden (e.g., Larsson et al., 2020; Wängqvist et al., 2016), to my knowledge there are no studies from the point of view of those who go against relational norms by not selecting their partner as the most important person to them when in need of love and support. In this thesis, Study

III aims to fill this gap in the literature by exploring the identity content of this group of Swedish early adults.

General Aim

The general aim of this thesis was to explore aspects of identity in early adulthood, namely romantic relationships and occupation, in the cultural context of Sweden in the 21st century. Study I investigated the identity content of early adults' repeated occupational narratives in order to discern which experiences continue to be part of the narrative identity concerning occupation across early adulthood. Study II investigated the meaning of change in narrative identity, by examining how repeated narratives concerning occupation changed across early adulthood. Study III explored romantic identity content among 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.

Summary of Studies

As the studies in this thesis took an experiential approach, the focus was on the participants' thoughts, feelings, and actions (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The analyses were conducted from a critical realist position, meaning that the participants' descriptions of their experiences in the interviews were analyzed as descriptions of what they have experienced, while it was also acknowledged that these descriptions were contextualized in, for example, culture (e.g., they might have told about their experiences in another way in a different cultural context) and situation (e.g., if the same questions as those asked in the interviews had been posed in another setting, they might have answered them quite differently). The studies were also based in identity theory (Erikson 1950; 1968, McAdams, 1993; 2001), in which identity is viewed as a sameness and continuity across time and situations, but also as something that has the potential to change over time as new experiences are added to old ones.

The Gothenburg Longitudinal Study of Development (GoLD)

The three studies in this thesis are part of the longitudinal GoLD project, conducted at the University of Gothenburg. GoLD was initiated by Professors C. Philip Hwang and Michael E. Lamb in 1981/1982, with a community sample of 144 children aged one to two years (Lamb et al., 1988). The participants were recruited from waiting lists for public childcare in different areas of Gothenburg, the second largest city in Sweden. Approximately 75% of the families who were contacted agreed to participate. These families had a variety of backgrounds, and the study group was considered to be representative of families in Gothenburg (Broberg, 1989). Since the beginning of the project there have been 11 waves of data collection, with a very high

retention rate (82-95%). The 11th wave was finalized in 2022. In this thesis, Studies I and II concern the eighth, ninth, and tenth waves of the GoLD project, while Study III concerns only the tenth wave. The eighth wave included 136 participants (68 women, 68 men; *Mage* = 24.9, *SD* = 0.7, 94% of the original sample), the ninth wave 124 participants (63 women, 61 men; *Mage* = 29.3, *SD* = 0.6, 86% of the original sample), and the tenth wave 124 participants (62 women, 62 men; *Mage* = 33.3, *SD* = 0.5, 86% of the original sample).

Study I

Aim

The aim of Study I was to investigate identity content of early adults' repeated occupational narratives in order to discern which experiences continue to be part of the narrative identity concerning occupation across early adulthood.

Method

Participants

Study I included participants who had taken part in Waves 8 (age 25), 9 (age 29), and 10 (age 33) of the GoLD study. A total of 118 participants had taken part in all three waves, and half of these were randomly selected to be part of this study. Based on our pilot reading of the material, it was estimated that half of the sample (*N = 59*, 177 interviews) would be sufficient to gather material for the analysis that was both varied and cohesive.

Measures

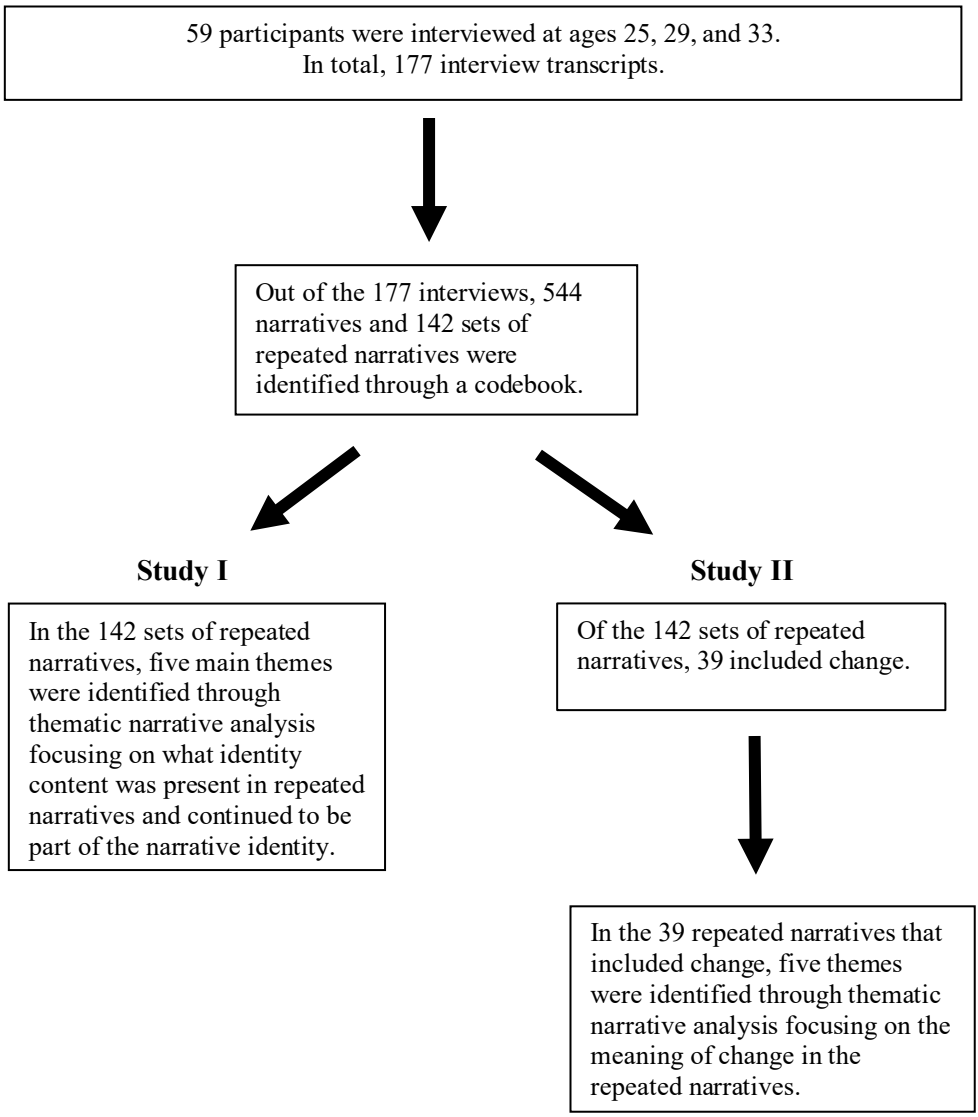
A structured background interview concerning demographic data such as participants' living situation, education, and current occupational status was conducted with all participants in the GoLD project at all three time points.

For this study, the occupational identity domain of Marcia's Ego Identity Status Interview (Marcia et al., 1993) from all three time points was used. Questions concerned past, present, and future occupational decisions, such as: "How did you come to choose to do [the type of work described]?"; and "How willing do you think you'd be to change your plans if something better came along?"

Data Analysis

For the steps of the data analysis, see the flowchart in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Flowchart of the data analysis process in Studies I and II



First, a codebook based on the works of Labov and Waletsky (1967) and McAdams (1993) was created to identify narratives (n = 544) and sets of repeated narratives (n = 142) across interview occasions at ages 25, 29, and 33 (see Appendix IV). Reliability was tested for identifying narratives ($\kappa = .64$, $p<.001$, 95% CI = 0.58-0.7) and repeated narratives across interview occasions ($\kappa = .92$, $p<.001$, CI = 0.89-0.95).

We then used thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008; Braun & Clarke, 2006) to the code sets of repeated narratives about development of occupational identity. First, all sets of repeated narratives were read and the content that was repeated in each set was marked. Thereafter, the marked content in each set of repeated narratives was given an initial code that captured aspects of occupational identity. These codes were then written down and grouped into overarching themes with subthemes. Throughout the analysis processes the thematic structure was discussed between the authors and reevaluated in relation to the data.

Main Findings

The thematic narrative analysis of the interviews resulted in five themes capturing identity content in the repeated narratives about occupational experiences in early adulthood (see Table 1).

Table 1.
Themes and subthemes from the thematic narrative analysis of the repeated narratives

Name of theme/subtheme	Description of theme/subtheme	Example of quote
1. Birth of an occupational interest	Repeated narratives concerning the birth of an interest that led to the current occupational orientation	"I loved to read when I was little; I read an extreme number of books. Liked to write and all, so I applied to be junior reporter at the local newspaper when I was 11."
2. Outcomes of exploring an occupational path	Repeated narratives involving different outcomes of the process of exploration of one's occupational path	
2.1 It was fun at the time but not a career	Repeated narratives concerning exploration simply based on passion, interest, or joy, that was abandoned in favor of getting a "real job"	"I had a very big interest in film at the time, and then I got into film studies, and I guess I didn't know what kind of expectations I had, really, but it was purely an interest."
2.2 It didn't work out	Repeated narratives in which participants had been heading for a desired occupational path but were somehow unsuccessful in their attempts	"I couldn't really make it work. I had an idea that I would succeed, but it didn't work out that way."
2.3 It wasn't for me	Repeated narratives in which participants had changed a set path, a decision that was rooted in their view of themselves	"I started studying science [and continued] for about a year, and then I realized that this wasn't really my thing, so I switched and studied art and graduated in that subject."

Name of theme/subtheme	Description of theme/subtheme	Example of quote
2.4 It was right for me	Repeated narratives in which participants, after some initial exploration, believed they had found their occupational path	"Then I realized, like, 'oh you could apply for a job and work with that'. It was over the course of an afternoon that I just decided 'of course I should do that'."
3. Compass for occupational direction	Repeated narratives about what had guided participants in their educational or occupational commitments	"When I started studying, I wanted to work with human rights law or martial law and asylum law; I came in as such an idealist."
4. External influence	Repeated narratives concerning being influenced by others when deciding on their occupational paths	
4.1. Being guided in occupational choices	Repeated narratives concerning explicit advice or expectations, others as inspirational sources, and practical help from important others	"My dad always helped me get into the business, and once you're in they don't care what you did before."
4.2 Feeling pressured to make a normative choice	Repeated narratives concerning situations when participants had had to choose between occupational directions: one they would like to choose and one they thought they ought to choose due to others' expectations	"I wanted to go to something more creative, but there was this pressure that if you have very good grades from compulsory school you should study science, so I studied science as well."
5. Passively ending up in an occupation	Repeated narratives in which the participant is passive in, for example, getting a job or moving forward by making a career move or changing occupations	"I thought I was going to work for a while and then study further, but when you're twenty-something and you move away from home and then you earn quite a lot of money quickly here; so yes, then

	I got stuck and I've been here ever since."

Through the narratives that participants repeated in Study I, it was evident that experiences that continued to be part of their narrative identity across early adulthood concerned different outcomes of occupational exploration, such as finding an occupational path that felt right or deciding that an occupational path wasn't for them. Participants also told narratives about their compass for occupational directions, how they had passively ended up in an occupation, and the birth of an interest that had led to their occupational orientation. They also repeatedly narrated about external influence. Study I thus shows experiences that continued to be part of the occupational identity across early adulthood.

Study II

Aim

The overall purpose of Study II was to investigate the meaning of change in narrative identity, by examining how repeated narratives concerning occupation changed across early adulthood.

Method

Participants

Study II included the same participants as Study I.

Measures

Study II used the same structured background interview concerning demographic data such as participants' living situation, education, and current occupational status, as well as the same material from the occupational identity domain of Marcia's Ego Identity Status Interview (Marcia et al., 1993), as used in Study I.

Data Analysis

For the steps of the data analysis, see the flowchart in Figure 1 on page 32.

Study II built on the sets of repeated narratives (n = 142) that were identified in Study I. These sets were examined with an inductive case-centered approach (Riessman, 2008) in order to determine how many of the narratives had changed between interview occasions. Out of the 142 sets of narratives, 39 sets included change.

Using an exploratory, data-driven approach, we performed an analysis based on the concept of thematic narrative analysis presented by Riessman (2008) and the method framework by Braun and Clarke (2006), focusing on how change is manifested in repeated narratives. The manifestation of change captures how the meaning of the narrative changes from the first time it is told to the repeated narrative, and what this change means for the narrator's identity. The authors examined the repeated narratives case by case and coded the specific segments within them that included change. These codes were then discussed among the authors and grouped into themes depending on their meaning for the individual's identity. Five themes were generated from the codes through an iterative process, with the authors examining and discussing all sets of changed repeated narratives.

Main Findings

The thematic narrative analysis of the 39 sets of repeated narratives that included change resulted in five themes capturing how change was manifested in the repeated narratives, and how the meaning of the narratives for the individuals' identity had changed (see Table 2).

Table 2.
Themes from the thematic narrative analysis of changes in the repeated narratives

Theme	**Description of change in repeated narratives**	**Quotes from narrative first told**	**Quotes from changed repeated narrative**
Gaining insights into one's identity	Gaining insights into identity over time, illustrated by a more elaborated understanding of choices made	"It [the environmental interest] came in that situation. I remember, yes, it's sort of funny that it was that kind of event that started it."	"Then the penny dropped, and I felt like 'we need to get more people to do more'. So at that point I realized that I should work in environmental science."
Transforming views of past challenges	Transformed views of challenging events, illustrated by participants toning down the event, finding new explanations, or changing a negative evaluation to a neutral or positive one	"I applied for lots and lots of jobs in advertising (…) I applied for jobs all summer and autumn."	"It wasn't a good time for the advertising business when I finished upper secondary school. There was a dip then, so it didn't feel like a good choice at the time."
Increasing agency	Increasing agency, illustrated by participants being more in charge of occupational choices over time, describing them more as their own, and more a part of their narrative identity	"It was a friend who had applied for the education program and I wasn't sure what I wanted to study and I applied for it."	"Before we started studying at university, a classmate – a best mate, – and I talked about what we should do in the future."

Theme	Description of change in repeated narratives	Quotes from narrative first told	Quotes from changed repeated narrative
Increasing motivation for occupational commitments	Increasing motivation that showed that the occupation had become more important on a personal level	"The woman who was responsible for the work environment quit and I was asked to stay and, well, I just ended up there."	"I'm more passionate about people feeling good and being safe at work. I feel it's an important role to work with these questions."
Accentuating competence and importance	Accentuating competence and importance, illustrated by participants developing the narrative to highlight the narrator	"I have been writing and working as a youth reporter at [a newspaper] once when I was very young."	"I loved to write and everything. I applied to become a youth reporter at [a newspaper] when I was 11, and there were, like, thousands who applied. There were 11 or 20 people who got the job, and I was one of them."

Note. One set of repeated narratives could be coded to more than one theme.

The themes identified in Study II showed how participants elaborated their repeated narratives on their occupational identity by adding content about gained insights, transformed views, and increased agency. The participants also added content to accentuate their competence and to show that their motivation for their present occupation had increased.

Study III

Aim

The aim of Study III was to explore romantic identity content among early adults who were in long-term relationships but did not select their partner as the most important person to them when in need of love and support.

Method

Participants and Procedure

With the goal of understanding the romantic identity of individuals to whom their partner was not the most important person when they needed love and support, participants from the GoLD project who were in long-term relationships but did not choose their partner as a response to a majority of the questions in a questionnaire (WHOTO; see *Measures*) were selected for the study. Ninety-four of the 124 participants in the tenth wave of GoLD were in long-term relationships, and 17 of these participants did not select their partner as a response in a majority of the WHOTO items. After a first reading of the material, five of these 17 participants were excluded from the study as they had marked their partner as their second choice, after their children, on one or more items. In reading the interviews with these five participants, it became clear that they described their partner as someone who meant a great deal to them alongside their children. Thus, as the focus of this study was early adults who do not consider their romantic partner to be the most important person to them when they need love and support, these five participants were removed from the analysis. The 12 remaining participants, four women and eight men, were in long-term relationships but did not select their partner as their first response (or as their second response after their children) in a majority of items in the questionnaire. Instead, they responded with (in descending order): parents, no one, friends, siblings, or other close relatives. The participants had been in a relationship for three and a half to 14 and a half years, with an average of eight years and four months.

Measures

A structured background interview concerning demographic data, such as relationship length and family situation, was conducted with all participants in the GoLD project.

Additionally, trained interviewers conducted Marcia's Ego Identity Status Interview (Marcia et al., 1993) with the participants. This interview contains questions about several identity domains, such as occupation, romantic relationships, parenthood, and family/work priorities; however, only the romantic domain was used in this analysis. Examples of questions in this domain include: "Is it important to you to have a long-term relationship?"; "What can one expect from one's partner in a relationship?"; and "What do you think has influenced your views on relationships?".

Furthermore, participants completed the WHOTO questionnaire (Hazan & Zeifmann, 1994; Fraley & Davis, 1997), with ten items, including "Person you seek out when worried or upset"; "Person you miss when they are away"; and "Person you know always wants the best for you". They answered these items by listing the persons (e.g., partner, mother, brother, friend) who fulfil their needs for close contact and comfort. In the present study, the reliability of this version of the WHOTO questionnaire was high: Cronbach's $\alpha = .9$.

Data Analysis

An exploratory, inductive thematic analysis of the romantic domain of the Identity Status Interview was conducted in accordance with the methodology suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). Exploration of the interview data began with reading the interview transcripts several times and noting elements that were central to the study aim. These notes were then used to generate initial codes by coding relevant features of the data in a systematic way across the

data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were then developed by aggregating codes with similar content. Throughout the analysis process, the thematic structure was discussed among the authors and was reevaluated in relation to the data. Disagreements among the authors were discussed until consensus was reached.

Main Findings

The thematic analysis of the interviews resulted in three themes capturing the romantic identity of these individuals in early adulthood who do not consider their romantic partner to be the most important person to them when in need of love and support (see Table 3).

Table 3. Themes and subthemes from the thematic analysis

Name of theme/subtheme	Description of theme/subtheme	Example of quote
1. Distancing attitudes toward romantic relationships	Participants emphasized their independence in regard to romantic relationships, having conflicting and ambivalent opinions about being in a relationship, and disagreeing with societal norms concerning romantic relationships	
1.1. Independence in the romantic relationship	Participants emphasized their independence and spoke of relationships as unimportant	"I'm very keen on feeling free and I easily feel suffocated."
1.2 Ambivalence about romantic relationships	Participants expressed ambivalent and conflicting statements concerning romantic relationships	"It's kind of sweet to be alone, but it's also kind of sweet not being alone."
1.3 Disagreeing with the norms	Participants expressed disagreement with social norms concerning how things should be with regard to romantic relationships	"It's strange that you're supposed to find someone who you should be with all your life."
2. Desirable aspects of romantic relationships	Participants described what they considered to be desirable aspects of romantic relationships	
2.1. The partner as a fun buddy to talk to	Participants described the relationship as nice and amusing, and their partner as someone who was good company	"Always nice to have company. Do things together and hang out."

Name of theme/subtheme	Description of theme/subtheme	Example of quote
2.2 The importance of having someone to start a family with	Participants stated that a relationship was important if they were going to start a family, even though being in a relationship might not be important to them	"I think it's mostly just about being a dad."
3. Not thinking about romantic relationships	Participants reflected on the fact that they did not think much about their relationships	"I've never thought about it. I know that many do."

The experience of going against the relational norm, by not considering one's long-term partner the most important person when one is in need of love and support, was reflected in the individuals' romantic identity in several ways. These individuals showed distancing attitudes toward romantic relationships, such as feeling ambivalent about being in a romantic relationship, emphasizing their independence, and being critical of what they perceived as general relational norms, such as getting married and staying together for the rest of their life. When they described desirable aspects of romantic relationships, their statements were not marked by any deeper connection with their partner but rather by doing things together and sharing interests. However, a partner was important to many participants in order to start a family. Finally, participants also stated that they did not think about romantic relationships in general. These early adults who did not consider their long-term partner the most important person to them when in need of love and support had a complex approach to relational norms, whereby they followed the norm of being in a long-term relationship while in various ways expressing distance regarding romantic relationships.

General Discussion

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. Study I investigated identity content of early adults' repeated occupational narratives in order to discern which experiences continue to be part of the narrative identity concerning occupation across early adulthood. Study II investigated the meaning of change in narrative identity, by examining how repeated narratives concerning occupation changed across early adulthood. Study III explored romantic identity content among early adults in long-term relationships who did not select their partner as the most important person to them when they needed love and support.

The results of the studies are discussed below, starting with a comprehensive discussion of the studies' contributions followed by a discussion of identity in early adulthood in 21st-century Sweden. In the final part, practical and clinical implications are discussed, followed by methodological and ethical discussions, before the conclusions of the thesis are drawn.

The three studies in this thesis have explored aspects of two of the primary identity domains of early adulthood, namely occupation (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966) and romantic relationships (McLean et al., 2016; Crocetti et al., 2012; Vosylis et al., 2018). In Studies I and II, participants were randomly selected to be part of the study of occupational identity, while Study III specifically targeted the romantic experiences of a specific group. There is an advantage to using a community sample in the study of occupational identity, as participants in Studies I and II show a variety of social backgrounds,

educational levels, and occupational contexts compared to, for example, a sample with only university students. However, while studies of the normative ways of developing give a general picture of development, they have also been criticized for excluding those who do not fit into these stories of development (Syed & McLean, 2022). Excluding these individuals leads to a gap in our understanding of other developmental stories, which are also important from both a developmental and a clinical point of view. Thus, this thesis contributes important insights regarding both identity development in the general population in Studies I and II as well as what a different story of identity can look like in Study III, and also offers an illustration of the complexity of identity development in early adulthood. Study I shows different ways occupational paths can be taken in early adulthood as well as the impact of cultural context, social roles, and the individual's everyday experiences on identity; Study II, through repeated narratives, shows how narrative identity continues to develop over time, that the way we narrate our past is not fixed, and that changes in repeated narratives can offer important information about identity growth and how narrators create something new from their past in order to continue making sense of their lives; and Study III shows that, even if individuals have made practical commitments in life by being in a long-term relationship this does not mean they must comply with normative perceptions of how commitments are supposed to be, and that the experience of being in a long-term relationship entails a complex interaction between contradicting feelings, values, and behaviors. The main results of the studies will be discussed in the following sections, specifically identity in early adulthood in 21st-century Sweden, repeated narratives as a means to explore narrative identity, and how everyday experiences can illuminate identity content.

Identity in Early Adulthood in 21st-Century Sweden

All three studies in this thesis were conducted with early adults in Sweden, a country that has repeatedly been classified as extreme when it comes to individualized values such as secular-rational values and self-expression (e.g., World Values Survey, 2020). The impact of culture and society was evident in all three studies, through both norms and expectations as well as laws and structures concerning marital relations, education, and the labor market. In Study I the impact of social structures on repeated identity narratives was evident in narratives in which the narrators had been heading for a desired occupational path but did not succeed in their attempts due to educational or labor market structures, such as in the subtheme *It didn't work out*. These repeated narratives included, for example, failure to get into one's educational program of choice in upper secondary school or university due to low grades, an experience that might reflect inequity in access to opportunities. Previous research from Sweden (Broady & Börjesson, 2008) has shown that Swedish upper secondary school is highly segregated in relation to social class, and that students with lower grades – such as boys, students with an immigrant background, and students from lower social classes – are disadvantaged. This means that with the repeated narratives within this subtheme, the lack of access to educational resources can be interpreted as being part of these participants' occupational identity even if this is not explicitly stated. Another possible view of these repeated narratives could be that the participants have not given up on a former "possible self" (Markus & Nurius, 1986), presenting this in retrospect as an alternative identity. According to Syed and McLean (2022), culturally shared narratives that shape thoughts, beliefs, values, and behaviors – known as master narratives – can be limiting for people on the margins of society, who cannot live up to the ideals of these narratives. Furthermore, deviating from

the master narrative means a risk of isolation, as these persons might not feel like they fit in or belong in the mainstream culture. By presenting themselves as someone who could have been accepted into a higher status program, these narrators find a way to align more with the master narrative of education in Sweden. Other repeated narratives in Study I, such as those gathered in the theme *Feeling pressured to make a normative choice*, illuminated cultural impact. In these repeated narratives, participants had not made a choice based on their own principles or interests; instead, their repeated narratives concerned making a "good choice" according to cultural norms. All participants who told these narratives had made good grades and narrated about having been pushed toward university preparatory studies, sometimes even more specifically the science program, even though they had not been interested in science at the time. It should be noted that cultural structures and norms affect the identity even when they work in a person's favor, such as having a privileged position as white and middle class; however, these structures might not be as visible as when they are oppressive (Syed & McLean, 2022; Galliher et al., 2017). Positive influences on identity development may be highly dependent on structural aspects of one's society that are beyond one's control. Therefore, repeated narratives can greatly vary concerning the interaction between the individual and society as well as how social structures may shape identity pathways. In Study II the cultural impact on the identity was particularly notable in certain narratives – for example in the theme *Increasing agency* – which at a later interview occasion were more agentic and could be examples of narratives that adhere to the Western master narrative of career development, as agency is often associated with achieving valued outcomes and self-mastery, as well as a desire for power, status, and prestige (McAdams, 1993; Bauer & McAdams, 2004), qualities that are useful in the occupational context (Dunlop et al., 2014). In Study II, changes were related to positive developmental processes as almost all narratives changed in a positive

direction (increased agency, gained insights), which shows that one important function of change in repeated narration is to facilitate identity growth. An altogether different way of changing a repeated narrative was found in the theme *Transforming views of past challenges*, in which narrators repeated narratives of past challenges that at the later interview occasion were more toned down and limited compared to the first. Most previous research on narratives that involve transforming past challenges has been done in a North American context, where the redemptive sequence (i.e., challenges transforming into good outcomes) in life stories is considered a master narrative (McAdams, 2006: 2013). However, research from the United Kingdom (Blackie et al., 2020) and Sweden (Eriksson et al., 2020a) suggests that although redemptive themes are present in narratives about difficult experiences and trauma, other ways of narrating these experiences (e.g., recuperation, combined positive and negative emotion, neutrality) are more common than, or as common as, redemptive narratives. The toned-down manner in which some narrators in Study II repeated their challenging experience may thus have functioned to express distance in regard to what had happened and to show, in a culturally appropriate way, that the narrator had moved forward in their narrative identity. This study indicates that there can be different cultural impacts on the narratives people tell, from both a larger global or Western culture as well as the national or local culture. Therefore, there is a need for more research on the different ways of narrating identity development.

In Study III the subtheme *Disagreeing with the norms* showed the participants' views on cultural norms, which is the first level of the identity content model (Galliher et al., 2017), with statements indicating that individuals who go against the relational norm of considering their partner the most important person when they need love and support can disagree with other relational norms as well. Many participants were also critical of relational

norms such as getting married and staying together for the rest of your life. The criticism of romantic relationship norms may reflect a clash for the participants between two norm systems in Sweden – a great emphasis on being independent (World Values Survey, 2020) and the notion that one should be in a romantic relationship as an adult (e.g., Wängqvist et al., 2016). These two norm systems exist in society and affect identity at the same time, just as Study II shows two different cultural impacts on the narrative identity, both a larger global or Western culture as well as the national or local culture. In Study III, several participants also stated that they were aware that their attitude toward romantic relationships went against the norms concerning romantic relationships. These results illustrate the impact of the cultural context on views regarding romantic relationships, as the participants' descriptions of what constitutes relational norms were the same as in previous studies of such norms in Sweden (e.g., Strandell, 2018; Wängqvist et al., 2016). This shows that cultural norms affect even those who do not share these normative ideals. Taken together, all three studies in this thesis illuminate, in different ways, the impact of society and cultural norms on identity content and development in early adulthood. While the impact of cultural norms in both Studies I and III was seen in the actual content of the interviews, such as participants referring to specific norms, in Study II the cultural impact was evident in the way the changes were narrated. Moreover, in Study I societal structures, more specifically the education system, were also shown to have a great impact on identity. The results therefore show the importance of studying identity in context on not only the individual level but also interpersonal and cultural levels.

Examining Repeated Narratives to Explore Narrative Identity

In this thesis, Studies I and II examined repeated narratives in the occupational context to illuminate aspects of narrative identity concerning occupation. In the following sections I discuss the exploration of identity content and identity developmental processes and their meaning for narrative identity concerning occupation in early adulthood.

Exploring Identity Content

The repeated narratives in Study I that continue to be an important part of the occupational identity included both positive aspects, such as finding an occupational path that feels right, and negative aspects, such as feeling pressured to make a choice that might not turn out the way one might have wanted. The repeated narratives also involved identity content on several of the levels in the identity content model (Galliher et al., 2017), such as cultural context, social roles, and identity domains. How these levels affect identity can be understood through the everyday experiences (the fourth level of the model) that are described in the repeated narratives. This is discussed in the following paragraph.

One interesting finding in Study I was that the choice of program for upper secondary school remained an important part of participants' occupational identity, as reflected in the subthemes *Feeling pressured to make a normative choice* and *It didn't work out.* The negative aspects of the choice for upper secondary school involved an inner conflict between making a useful choice of program according to cultural norms on the one hand and following one's heart on the other, as well as failure to get into one's program of choice due to low grades, which are both aspects that previous research (Broady & Börjesson, 2008; Dresch & Lovén, 2010) has shown to be present at the time

of choosing program for upper secondary school. These results from Study I illustrate how societal and cultural structures influence identity development, as proposed in the first level of the identity content model (Galliher et al., 2017) – cultural contexts – as these experiences also seem to continue to be part of the occupational identity through the repeated narratives. This reinforces previous research that has shown that the choice of program for upper secondary school at the time of choosing is perceived as difficult, painful, and frustrating but also as unavoidable, as the possibility to choose not to study and instead manage to get a job at this age seems all too unrealistic (Lundahl, 2010). The narratives about feeling pressured to make a normative choice can also be examples of normative process orientation, in which individuals are more concerned with conforming to normative standards and less with making their own decisions (Berzonsky, 1989). In contrast, other participants also repeated narratives concerning being passionate about their subject in upper secondary school, shown in the subtheme *It was fun at the time but not a career* under the main theme *Outcomes of exploring occupational paths*, which included repeated narratives about outcomes of explorations. These could be seen as examples of information process orientation, meaning that individuals actively look up, process, and consider different forms of information before making decisions (Berzonsky, 1989). Repeated narratives about exploration were also expected, since the first period of early adulthood is usually devoted to figuring out what one wants to do before one can make serious commitments (Arnett, 2012), and the last interview occasion took place at the breaking point in early adulthood between exploration in emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2001) and implementation of commitments in established adulthood (Metha et al., 2020).

In the repeated narratives in Study I captured in the subtheme *Being guided in occupational choices*, two levels of the identity content model (Galliher et al., 2017) were present – social roles and identity domains – as participants

spoke of different forms of guidance that had been provided by important persons such as parents, other family members, or teachers. The second level of the identity content model – social roles – was evident in this theme, as most relationships in the repeated narratives put the narrators in the position of a well-defined role, such as child or student in relation to parent or teacher. Although this form of "social capital" (Arnett, 2014b) might not have been the one thing that led them to their current occupational path, it might have helped them get a foot in the door of the labor market, or given them a push in the right direction, which has obviously been of great help to these participants since they continue to narrate about important others. Although narrators in most repeated narratives captured in this subtheme were grateful to the person who had helped or inspired them, there is no doubt that the narrators were in a subordinate social role vis-à-vis that person, for example in the child-parent or student-teacher relationship. However, as these repeated narratives mainly involve being guided toward their current occupation, the impact on their identity seems to be connected to a positive experience of guidance.

The third level of the identity content model (Galliher et al., 2017) is identity domains, which are the various life areas that are central to individuals' identity, such as considering their occupation to be important for who they are. That narratives about important persons are repeated in the subtheme *Being guided in occupational choices*, and can thus be considered a salient part of the narrative identity, aligns with the study by McLean et al. (2016) on narrative identity content. This study shows that narratives about interpersonal relationships are especially salient during this developmental stage, and that the intersection of identity domains is generally related to the identity development process of meaning-making. In Study I it is evident that even in the occupational domain, family and other important persons play a great part in the development of a narrative identity, and thus that the occupational and interpersonal domains intersect.

Many of the repeated narratives in Study I concerned the fourth level of the identity content model (Galliher et al., 2017) – everyday experiences – capturing experiences such as thoughts, feelings, and actions from specific moments in people's lives associated with their identities. The repeated narratives about occupation included identity content concerning both active exploration of occupational identity decisions, such as in the theme *Outcomes of exploring occupational paths*, as well as going with the flow and making occupational decisions without giving them much thought. The repeated narratives in the theme *Passively ending up in an occupation* mostly included simple statements that the narrator had ended up in a job and remained there. This aligns with previous research on work experiences in emerging adulthood, the period between 18 and 29 years, which shows that many adults in this time of life express that they have not really chosen their current job but just "found themselves in it" one day (Arnett, 2014b, p. 179). What is interesting in this study is that participants continue to repeat the narratives about "ending up" or "finding themselves" in an occupation, as if the narratives explained why their occupational path took a specific turn. This might imply that the participants want to point out that they take little responsibility for their choices, and may be an example of a more diffused process orientation when making choices, which involves procrastination until the situation demands action (Berzonsky, 1989). Previous research has shown that individuals who have not explored alternatives involving their life choices may face more difficulties when experiencing a situation in which their previous experience and learned reactions are not sufficient, compared to someone who has thought through other possible options (Marcia et al., 1993). This might be why repeated narratives about events following exploration in the theme *Outcomes of exploring occupational paths* also contained narratives about moving on, such as those in the subtheme *It wasn't for me*. Here, participants repeated narratives about when they had explored an occupational path but discovered it wasn't

what they wanted to do and moved on to a different occupational path. Narratives about the experience of passively ending up doing something, however, did not contain narratives about moving on. What is certain, however, is that identity content continues to develop in adulthood, with some identity decisions remaining while others are abandoned (Erikson et al., 1986; Kroger, 2015).

Exploring Identity Developmental Processes

In this section, I discuss the different identity developmental processes included in the changes in the repeated narratives in Study II. The first developmental process that was represented through the changes in the repeated narratives was captured in the theme *Gaining insights into one's identity*. At the first timepoint these narratives were likely to be more straightforward and contain limited accounts of an event in which the narrator showed no or little insight about the occupational path they pursued. At later interview occasions, the narratives had evolved and contained more depth and broadened views of the choices made, thus bringing more meaning into the narrators' identity. Such meaning-making has been found to be associated with ego development (Bauer et al., 2005) and perceived identity growth (McLean et al., 2021), supporting the idea that the process of gaining insights in one specific context (such as occupation) can also be connected to identity development in general (Mitchell et al., 2021; Syed & McLean, 2016).

Another example of identity developmental processes in Study II was the change of meaning in the narratives found in the theme *Accentuating competence and importance*. In this theme the narrators were increasingly likely to include new details about obstacles, but the repeated narratives would often end on a positive note with the narrators being rewarded for going their own way or for being competent. Thus, by repeatedly engaging with the same

narrative, narrators used the narrative form to elaborate their competence and importance, creating a more positive narrative of their identity. In this way, this study shows that change in identity can indeed be found in how people narrate their earlier experiences with new meanings.

Further examples of identity development processes are found in the theme *Increasing agency*, in which narrators repeated narratives about events and tended to feel more in charge of their choices at later interviews, describing the decisions more as their own. The identity developmental process of increasing agency that was explored in Study II is in line with previous research that has shown that individuals who tell agentic narratives internalize their actions, reflect on them, and engage in them with a full sense of choice (Adler et al., 2012), and part of the definition of agentic growth is the sense that one can influence one's environment (Bauer & McAdams, 2004). This sense of influence on the environment may come easier when individuals have acquired more knowledge and experience in one context of life (such as gaining work experience). This is consistent with research on autobiographical memory that shows that human memory remembers and re-encodes events to make them comply with the individual's current goals, self-image, and self-beliefs, which shapes the accessibility of both memories and their content (Conway, 2005). In contrast, previous research has found a tendency for agency to decline with repeated narration (Booker et al., 2021). However, in their study, Booker et al. (2021) only found a decline in narratives about low points. In Study II the participants were not specifically asked about low points; instead, all narratives that were repeated and changed were taken into account. The kind of experience that is retold could therefore play an important role in the development of agency, as it is not only the content but also the meaning of the repeated narrative for the individual's present identity that changes. Indeed, narratives that have been repeated over a long period of time, such as those examined in Studies I and II, may hold a specific value for the narrator; and

change in these narratives may therefore shed light on changes that are meaningful to the general identity development process.

Examining Everyday Experiences to Explore Identity Content

The everyday experiences of early adults who do not turn to their partner when in need of love and support in Study III were characterized by a strive for independence, feeling ambivalent, describing one's partner as someone to have fun with or start a family with rather than someone to be close to, and not thinking about romantic relationships. In this section, the fourth level of the identity content model (Galliher et al., 2017) – everyday experiences – is examined. According to Galliher et al. (2017), everyday experiences can be conceptualized as not only specific moments in people's lives, such as the narrated events analyzed in Studies I and II, but also the day-to-day thoughts, feelings, and actions associated with individuals' identities. This later conceptualization is the one used in this discussion of examining everyday experiences to explore identity content.

The theme *Distancing attitudes toward romantic relationships* contained two subthemes that showed identity content through the everyday experiences of early adults who do not turn to their partner when in need of love and support: *Independence in the romantic relationship* and *Ambivalence about romantic relationships*. The everyday experiences captured in the subtheme *Independence in the romantic relationship* indicated that the early adults who do not turn to their partner when in need of love and support emphasized their independence, with several stating that being in a relationship was not important to them, even though they were currently in a long-term relationship. There are several ways to view this strive for independence in the relationship. A certain level of healthy independence can be a strength in a romantic

relationship (Feeney, 2007), for instance choosing to be with one's partner rather than being forced to stay with them for financial or emotional reasons. However, the negative experiences some early adults in Study III described were not in line with such healthy aspects of independence, as some experienced feeling suffocated by relationships in general and explicitly described themselves as loners. This aligns with research showing that individuals high in attachment avoidance – associated with a feeling of discomfort with intimacy and expressing feelings – who prioritize self-reliance and independence generally rate spending time with their romantic partner as more negative, and intimacy and trust in the relationship as less important than individuals with a secure attachment do (Monteolivia et al., 2016; Ren et al., 2017). Independence seemed to be important to their identity in general, considering that "no one" was the second most common answer on the WHOTO questionnaire concerning who they turned to when in need of love and support. Being unwilling or unable to turn to people when one needs emotional support is associated with lower levels of individual well-being when facing a personal crisis (Linn & McGranahan, 1980). Emphasizing independence and not turning to their partner when in need of love and support are thus behaviors that might be a problem for these participants when faced with stressful events. In contrast, Giddens (1992) proposes that an individual needs to experience personal space in order to flourish in a romantic relationship, and advocates "pure relationships"; that is, relationships that are entered into and sustained for their own sake, as long as the committed individuals are satisfied enough to stay in the relationship, and not because of normative or societal pressure. In this respect, by emphasizing an identity as independent, these participants are expressing views that could be seen as fitting into the late modern society (Giddens, 1992). The concept of pure relationships is rejected by Illouz (2012), however, who claims that the pure relationship contributes to instability in the private sphere and misery in the

romantic consciousness. According to Illouz (2012), the freedom to choose from a wide range of options in general, and to choose a romantic partner in particular, leads to a choice that is rational rather than intuitive, which impairs one's capability for emotional engagement. Therefore, following Illouz's argumentation, the rational choice of romantic partner leads to an incapacity for commitment as the process of looking for reasons to be satisfied enough to stay in the relationship lessens one's emotional engagement in relation to one's partner and creates an ambivalence about the relationship. This ambivalent stance in the everyday experiences of being involved in a long-term relationship while emphasizing independence and having a negative attitude toward relationships was captured in the descriptions of romantic relationships in the subtheme *Ambivalence about romantic relationships*. These descriptions reflected experiencing a feeling of ambivalence regarding both practical and emotional aspects of romantic relationships, for example saying it was exhausting to have to adapt to another person but still concluding that one would rather be in a relationship than not. The experience of enjoying both being alone and being with one's partner also created ambivalence. For persons who experience ambivalence about being in relationships in general, relational ambivalence is characterized both by internal conflicting relational goals and actions as well as by ambivalent attitudes toward romantic partners and relationships (Mikulicer et al., 2010), which can be seen in the descriptions of the everyday experiences of romantic relationships in Study III. However, despite the negative attitudes, none of the participants expressed that they were going through a crisis or seemed unhappy in their current relationship. Instead, they also described positive aspects of being in a romantic relationship, captured in the theme *Desirable aspects of romantic relationships* with the two subthemes *The partner as a fun buddy to talk to* and *The importance of having someone to start a family with*. The positive experiences were especially prevalent in the subtheme *The partner as a fun buddy to talk to*, although the

participants' statements were not marked by any deeper connection with their partner but rather by doing things together and sharing interests. The facile way these participants spoke about their experiences in the relationship with their partner might be a way of distancing themselves from normative expectations concerning one's social role as a romantic partner. Social roles are the second level of identity content in the identity content model (Galliher et al., 2017), and this level is connected to both cultural meanings (e.g., norms and expectations) and personal meaning (e.g., what being a romantic partner means to the individual). The statements in this subtheme did not show any personal impact the partner might have on how the participants viewed themselves. Research has shown that individuals who are high in attachment avoidance, and thus emphasize independence in relationships, do not weaken their commitment to their romantic relationship when they de-emphasize their dependence on their romantic partner or use humor to lighten the mood when describing the relationship (Girme et al., 2019). While the participants in Study III had a commitment to their partner, their descriptions of their social role as a partner were not so much characterized by any deeper connection with their partner as they were by doing things together and sharing interests. The participants' practicality resurfaced as they spoke about the importance of having someone to start a family with, in the subtheme *The importance of having someone to start a family with*. This subtheme captured the integration of different identity domains, which is the third level of the identity content model (Galliher et al., 2017), namely the romantic and parental domains. Although no questions were asked about family or children, participants spontaneously brought this subject up when talking about their romantic relationship. Thinking about family and having children when talking about romantic relationships is quite natural, as the role of co-parent is important for relationship satisfaction as well as life satisfaction among couples with children (Spörrle et al., 2010; Dyrdal et al., 2011). The way participants in

Study III brought up family and children in the interview on romantic relationships showed that different areas of identity intertwine, as different roles – for example partner and co-parent – can be hard to separate. Thus, the theme *Desirable aspects of romantic relationships* shows that examining everyday experiences makes it possible to understand identity content on the other levels of the identity content model (Galliher et al., 2017), such as the second level (social roles) and the third level (identity domains).

Practical and Clinical Implications

One result from Study I that might have practical implications is that the choice of program for upper secondary school remained an important part of participants' occupational identity, as seen in the subthemes *Feeling pressured to make a normative choice* and *It didn't work out*. Several participants repeated narratives about an inner conflict between making what was a good choice of program for upper secondary school according to cultural norms on the one hand and following their heart on the other. Narratives could also concern failing to get into one's program of choice due to low grades. These are both aspects that previous studies (Broady & Börjesson, 2008; Dresch & Lovén, 2010) have shown to be present at the time of choosing program, but these experiences also seem to continue to be an important part of the occupational identity. Previous research has shown that the choice of program for upper secondary school at the time of choosing is perceived as difficult, painful, and frustrating as well as unavoidable, due to the low possibility of managing to get a job at this age (Lundahl, 2010). As choosing an program for upper secondary school is difficult and frustrating for both students with good grades, who are pressured to choose a university preparatory program, and those with low grades, who fail to get into their (or any) program of choice, it

would be beneficial to investigate how to make this choice easier for all students, perhaps by delaying the high-stake choices and having a longer period of general education before they have to specialize. Making the choices in these years easier for adolescents would have benefits not only for their identity formation but also for the continuation of their identity development in early adulthood.

Study III explored experiences of romantic relationships among individuals who, despite being rather invisible in research, might be recognized by clinical practitioners such as family therapists. While individuals who go against the relational norm by not considering their partner the most important person to them when faced with relational needs might be a group that is limited in number, it is nonetheless important that their experiences be taken seriously. For example, if a person in a relationship does not know what they want or has difficulty expressing it, a relationship crisis can be harder to solve. Being reluctant to turn to people when in need of emotional support – which participants demonstrated in the theme *Distancing attitudes toward romantic relationships* – can also create problems, as this is associated with lower levels of individual well-being when facing a personal crisis (Linn & McGranahan, 1980). If the reason for this reluctancy is insecurity within the individual or the relationship, this might be something that the person needs to work with in therapy, alone or with their partner, to enhance their emotional security. However, practitioners should not underestimate the practical and fun-loving attitude toward relationships among these individuals; this might serve as material for the partners to find their way back to each other if they find themselves in a relationship crisis.

Methodological Considerations

Data Collection Methods

In all three studies in this thesis, the Identity Status Interview (Marcia et al., 1993) was used to collect qualitative data. Using the interview format in research on identity has been criticized for producing answers that might be affected by social desirability and the interviewer-respondent relationship (Bourne, 1978). One way to circumvent this problem can be "to establish conditions sufficiently free of coercive or intrusive elements" (p. 380). In order to establish conditions with minimized elements of coerciveness and intrusion, all the interviewers were thoroughly trained in the interview format, and several of them had interview technique training in their professional backgrounds.

Interviewing large numbers of participants in longitudinal projects can be complicated, as changes in the interview conditions, such as response format (McCoy & Dunlop, 2016) or level of interview structure (Eich et al., 1994), may affect the results. In this project, a semi-structured interview was performed with the same degree of interviewer presence and in the same response format with all participants in all waves of the GoLD project that are included in the thesis, which should entail a lower risk of negative methodological impact on the results. All in all, the interview format was considered the most suitable way to gather a large quantity of rich in-depth data on identity; thus, with the measures taken to minimize negative methodological impact on the data collection, the advantages of the interview format outweigh the disadvantages. In Studies I and II, the Identity Status Interview was used to collect narratives as a means to study narrative identity. While the Identity Status Interview does contain questions on how the

interviewee has arrived at their present identity commitments, they are not asked to tell their life story or explicitly relate how their experiences have influenced their identity. According to Camia and Habermas (2020), the entire life narrative is the best way to capture narrative identity as it covers the whole life span, with the different life events being coherently and meaningfully related to each other. However, as life narratives are made up of life events, the narrative identity is given substance by the singular narratives it consists of (Birren & Schroots, 2006). Therefore, collecting narratives about singular events from the Identity Status Interview could be a way of finding identity-relevant events in the narrators' lives, and of studying narrative identity. The very high numbers of narratives in Studies I and II show that our codebook was applicable for the purpose of finding narratives. There are, however, different conceptualizations of repetition that impact how it is examined. The two main conceptualizations are the way a story is narrated and the content of the narrative. A limitation in Studies I and II is that only the repeated content in the narratives was explored, while other narrative processes that might have been stable or changed in the narratives were not investigated (see e.g., McLean et al., 2021). However, as the purpose of Studies I and II was to explore identity content and changes in repeated narratives, respectively, looking into other narrative processes was beyond the research questions of these studies. Studies on how people repeat or change the way they narrate a story, regardless of content, will likely make an important contribution to future research on narrative identity. Furthermore, Study I explored the identity content in repeated narratives that continued to be part of the narrative identity. As repetition can mean both stability and stagnation, the results in Study I cannot account for whether the repetition of the narrated events has positive (stabilizing) or negative (stagnating) connotations. Further research on stability in repeated narratives may therefore benefit from studying identity developmental processes that separate identity stability from identity

stagnation in narrative identity. Another limitation specific to Study II is that the analysis of changes in repeated sets of narratives starts at age 25 and not earlier. In the analysis, only 27% (39 of 142) of the repeated sets of narratives changed, while the rest remained the same. The reason for the relatively low number of changed repeated narratives may be previous development within the occupational domain, as some narratives about participants' occupational identity might have changed before age 25 and remained the same after this. Further research on narrative identity development in the occupational domain in early adulthood may benefit from using a wider time frame, including the earliest years of early adulthood.

All three studies used specific domains in the interview – the romantic and the occupational – to examine elements of identity. One problem with only studying one domain at a time is that an integrative identity perspective is lost, meaning that researchers limit themselves to only one aspect of identity and do not take into account the multifaceted experience of being human (Syed & McLean, 2015). The need for an integrative identity perspective was evident in the results in Study III, in which participants spoke about aspects of parenthood, such as starting a family, in the interviews on romantic relationships. Previous research in general populations has shown that the roles of co-parent and romantic partner affect each other, as the role of co-parent is important for both relationship satisfaction and life satisfaction among couples with children (Spörrle et al., 2010; Dyrdal et al., 2011) and the quality of the romantic relationship affects the quality of the co-parenting (Le et al., 2016). Therefore, further research would benefit from studying the integration between identity aspects of romantic relations and parenthood in individuals who do not consider their romantic partner to be the most important person to them when they need love and support. Previous research has also shown that parenthood in general, and a balance between work and family in particular, are important parts of identity in early adulthood (Frisén et al., 2014; Gyberg

et al., 2019). According to Marcia et al. (1993), the choice of domains should also be based on the importance these domains are assumed to have to participants. However, in Study III the selected participants did not consider romantic relationships important. These participants were selected for this exploratory study because they exhibited a certain pattern of relating to their romantic partner, and in the selection it was not obvious that they would consider romantic relationships in general unimportant. Further research might focus on what implications the attitudes toward romantic relationships described in this analysis might have for the relationship, including the facile descriptions of one's romantic partner. It may also be beneficial to conduct further research concerning whether this attitude is specific to romantic relationships or if it applies to other life areas as well. The procedure of studying identity domains means that there will be no overall picture of the individuals' identity; instead, the studies may provide a deeper understanding of the participants' identities when it comes to occupation and romantic relationships.

Data Analysis

Qualitative studies open for the investigation of processes and content that cannot be observed in quantitative analyses. In all three studies of this thesis, the qualitative investigations were based on the method framework by Braun and Clarke (2006); however, Studies I and II were also based on the concept of thematic narrative analysis presented by Riessman (2008). Thematic analysis was chosen because it is a structured yet flexible method that allows the researcher to produce a rich, detailed, and complex account of the data. The decision to base the studies on the method framework by Braun and Clarke (2006) instead of later versions of reflexive thematic analysis (e.g. Braun &

Clarke, 2022) was made due to the updated positions on ontological and epistemological demands presented in the later versions. While Braun and Clarke (2006) previously described that thematic analysis could be both an essentialist/realist method and a constructionist method, in 2022 they claimed that realist approaches do not align with reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). As the focus in this thesis is the experiences, meanings, and reality of participants in the studies (framed as a realist view in Braun & Clarke, 2006), the use of the previous methods (i.e., Braun & Clarke, 2006; Riessman, 2008) seemed more appropriate. The analyses used in the three studies were also not compliant with other versions of thematic analysis that take a more realist approach, such as Boyatzis (1998), as these offered less flexibility than was needed in these analyses. However, the realist approach aligns with Riessman's (2005) description of thematic narrative analysis whereby emphasis is placed on the content of a narrative – that is, what is said rather than how it is said – and language is considered a direct route to the experiences described.

In the following methodological discussion, the studies will be discussed separately as their respective methodological choices were based on different decisions.

Studies I and II included both vertical analyses (examining each case separately to find repeated narratives) and horizontal analyses (comparing codes across cases to form themes) (Langemar, 2008), which made the thorough longitudinal qualitative analysis possible. One consideration in both studies was that only information provided in narrative form was included in the analysis of changes in the repeated sets of narratives. This means that if information was given in an interview but not as a narrative, this information was not considered in the analysis as this was beyond the scope of the research question. In Study II it would also have been possible to study the process of autobiographical reasoning – that is, the process of making connections

between the experiences of one's past and present and different aspects of the self (Habermas & Köber, 2015; McLean & Fournier, 2008) – as part of the process of concluding what the changes in the repeated narratives meant for the narrative identity. However, a focus on the autobiographical reasoning process would have meant abandoning the part of the research question that focused on the meaning of the change in repeated narratives. Therefore, the narrative identity was chosen as the level of analysis in Study II. This study also showed that it is not only the content but also the meaning of the repeated narrative for the individual's present identity that changes. Indeed, narratives that have been repeated over a long period of time may hold a specific value for the narrator, and change in these narratives may therefore shed light on changes that are meaningful for general identity development. Future longitudinal research on narrative identity development could include a mixed-methods approach (see e.g., Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017), such as adding measures on satisfaction with life to this type of analysis in order to contribute to knowledge of how change in repeated narration is associated with well-being, which in turn could lead to knowledge of how to use repeated narration to promote well-being.

In Study III it was considered most suitable to conduct thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and use a horizontal analysis model (Langemar, 2008), forming the themes by comparing codes across participants rather than analyzing each participant separately. Despite the fact that we looked for the experiences of romantic relationships among the participants, we did not want to focus only on the subjective experience and see romantic relationships through the participants' eyes, as in phenomenological analysis (Langemar, 2008), but also wanted to broaden the picture and connect this to other parts of their identity content such as norms, social roles, and domains (Galliher et al., 2017). Furthermore, as this study took place within a research project focused on personality and identity development, the data collection had already been

done. Based on the research question the selection of participants and material was predetermined, as we had decided to analyze the Identity Status Interview's romantic relationship domain among participants who did not select their romantic partner as the most important person when in relational need. Therefore, we did not regard Grounded Theory as a suitable alternative, with its focus on adding new data until saturation is achieved (Langemar, 2008). The most suitable analysis method for this study was thus thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), as it gave the best combination of structure and flexibility and allowed for a rich, detailed, and complex account of the data.

One limitation in Study III, however, is that the study cannot conclude whether the themes are unique to individuals who do not turn to their long-term partner for love and support or if they would also be present among individuals who do rely on their long-term partner for such things. The focus of Study III was early adults who do not turn to their long-term partner when they need love and support, and the analysis was designed to promote a deep understanding of how these individuals experience romantic relationships. A comparative analysis between early adults who do, and those who do not, turn to their partner could be an interesting venue for future studies; however, there is value in studying these early adults who do not turn to their partner in their own right, especially as this group has received little attention in previous research. Moreover, in this study, staying true to the research question and keeping the focus on the experiences of these specific individuals added to the conceptual coherence of the analyses, which is an important principle in thematic analysis as well as in other qualitative methodologies (Braun & Clarke, 2022). If we had compared these individuals who do not turn to their partner with those who have a more normative relationship development, the focus would instead have been on how these two groups differ rather than offering an in-depth understanding of the experiences of those who do not turn

to their partner for love and support. Therefore, Study III can hopefully serve as a first step toward illuminating the experiences of romantic relationships among early adults who go against relational norms by not regarding their romantic partner as the most important person to them when faced with relational needs, a group we know very little about.

Ethical Considerations

The three studies in this thesis have been ethically reviewed and approved in accordance with the Swedish Ethical Review Act (2003:460) by the ethical review committee in Gothenburg (Wave 8, Dnr: 311-06; Wave 9, Dnr: 206-11; Wave 10, Dnr: 263-15). The risks of discomfort and violation of the participants' integrity in the studies were considered to be low. However, when considering ethics in research, the ethical approval of a study should not be seen as final but rather as a starting point, as "ethics are not just a means, but rather constitute a universal end goal of qualitative quality itself, despite paradigm" (p. 846, Tracy, 2010).

Ethics in Data Collection

As the project of which the studies are a part is longitudinal and has been ongoing since 1982, there was always a risk that participants would feel obliged to participate, since they had participated so many times before. In order to avoid this, from the first contact (typically via letter) onward participants were informed that participation was voluntary and that they could retract their consent at any time with no questions asked. They could also decide for themselves where they would like to be interviewed (for example at the university, via phone or Skype, in their home, or at another place of their choice). As the interview focused on issues that can be difficult to talk about,

participants could also choose not to answer certain questions without being further asked about this decision. This was important, of course, not least in cases in which participants may have felt that their life situation was not in accordance with societal norms, such as those who were unemployed, did not want or could not have children, or were not in conventional romantic relationships. However, the interview guide was semi-structured and thus could be, and should be, adapted to each individual, so that participants could tell their stories the way they wanted to. Finally, as previously mentioned, all interviewers in the three studies were trained in the interview format and had Master of Science degrees in Psychology, several with a clinical orientation, which meant that they had interview technique training in their professional backgrounds.

Ethics in the Analysis and Presentation of Data

Research in the humanities and social sciences suffers from inherent ethical problems when it comes to the analysis and presentation of collected data (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009). For example, in all psychological research that includes human subjects there is a hierarchy between researcher and informant that always entails a certain amount of exercise of power, whereby the researcher has the power to identify, include, and exclude aspects of the material provided by the informant (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009). As this thesis is based on the qualitative analysis of interviews – that is, stories that informants tell us about themselves – the ethical perspective when it comes to analyzing and presenting the research is especially important. According to Tracy (2010), researchers should be careful not to depict participants as something they are not in order to get a great research story. This is highly relevant in regard to Study III, in which the participants are presented as "going

against the relational norm of considering their partner the most important person" based on their answers to a questionnaire – a description that, despite their answers, they might not agree with. The possibility to acquire knowledge about this group that has been overlooked in research, and the contribution this knowledge can make to research on romantic relationships, were considered to outweigh the risk of using their stories in a way they might not have considered when they decided to participate in the research project. In the present studies it was not possible to use, for example, member reflections (Tracy, 2010), as it would have been an invasion of privacy to contact the participants as they had not agreed to this when they provided consent. Instead, the participants of the GoLD project were informed that they could contact the person responsible for the project to find out more about the research being conducted. They could also, upon request, view their own raw data. Furthermore, through a coding system, the interviews have been kept separate from other data that might have made it possible to identify the participants, and potentially identifying information in the presented quotes has also been carefully masked. Taken together, despite the potential risks to participants that are always present in research, the authors of the studies as well as the ethical review committee in Gothenburg deemed that the benefits of the research outweighed any possible harm thanks to the measures taken before, during, and after the data collection, as well as in the analysis and presentation of the data.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the three studies in this thesis contribute to the understanding of occupational and romantic identity in early adulthood in the cultural context of Sweden in the early 21st century. Study I illuminates experiences that continued to be part of participants' occupational identity across early adulthood such as the birth of an interest that had led to their occupational orientation, different outcomes of occupational exploration, and external influence on occupational decisions, as well as having a compass for their occupational direction and passively ending up in a occupation. The results from Study II show that changes in repeated narratives can contain important information on how narrators continue to make sense of their lives. The findings clarify how narrators changed their identity narratives about occupation to elaborate narratives about gained insights, transformed views, and increased agency. The participants also added content to accentuate their competence and to show that their motivation for their present occupation had increased. In Study III, the results show that early adults who did not consider their long-term partner to be the most important person to them when in need of love and support had a complex approach to relational norms. Their descriptions of experiences in romantic relationships were characterized by ambivalence, a strive for independence, and relating to their partner as a person to have fun with rather than share a deep connection with.

Taken together, by studying repeated narratives and accounts of the individual's own experiences across early adulthood, we can better understand how identity is complex, continuous, and changing at this time in life. 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.

References

Adler, J. M. (2012). Living into the story: Agency and coherence in a longitudinal study of narrative identity development and mental health over the course of psychotherapy. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 102(2), 367–389. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025289

Adler, J. M. (2019). Stability and change in narrative identity: Introduction to the special issue on repeated narration. *Qualitative Psychology*, 6(2), 134–145. https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000155

Adler, J. M., Dunlop, W. L., Fivush, R., Lilgendahl, J. P., Lodi-Smith, J., McAdams, D. P., McLean, K. C., Pasupathi, M., & Syed, M. (2017). Research methods for studying narrative identity: A primer. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, *8*(5), 519–527. https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550617698202

Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist*, 55, 469–480. http://doi.org/10.1037//0003-066X.55.5.469

Arnett, J. J. (2001). Conceptions of the transition to adulthood: Perspectives from adolescence through midlife. *Journal of*

Adult Development, *8*, 133–143. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1026450103225

Arnett, J. J. (2012). New horizons in research on emerging and young adulthood. In A. Both, S. L. Brown, N. S. Landale, W. D. Manning, & S. M. McHale (Eds.), *Early adulthood in a family context* (pp. 231–244). New York, NY: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-1436-0_15

Arnett, J. J. (2014a). A longer road to adulthood. In J. J. Arnett (Ed.), *Emerging adulthood: The winding road from the late teens through the twenties* (pp. 1–29). New York, NY: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199929382.003.0001

Arnett, J. J. (2014b). Work: More Than a Job. In J. J. Arnett (Ed.), *Emerging adulthood: The winding road from the late teens through the twenties* (pp. 169–193). New York, NY: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199929382.003.0007

Arnett, J. J. (2014c). How Important Is Social Class?. In J. J. Arnett (Ed.), *Emerging adulthood: The winding road from the late teens through the twenties* (pp. 244–265). New York, NY: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199929382.003.0010

Bauer, J. J., & McAdams, D. P. (2004). Personal growth in adults' stories of life transitions. *Journal of Personality*, *72*(3), 573–602. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3506.2004.00273.x

Bauer, J. J., McAdams, D. P., & Sakaeda, A. R. (2005). Interpreting the good life: Growth memories in the lives of mature, happy people. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 88*, 203–217. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.88.1.203

Bengtsson, M., & Berglund, T. (2017). *Arbetslivet* [Work Life] (3rd ed.). Lund, Sweden: Studentlitteratur.

Berk, L. E. (2014). *Exploring Lifespan Development*, (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson. Berzonsky, M. D. (1989). Identity style: Conceptualization and measurement. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 4*(3), 268–282. https://doi.org/10.1177/074355488943002

Birren, J. E., & Schroots, J. F. (2006). Autobiographical Memory and the Narrative Self over the Life Span. In J. E. Birren & K. W. Schaie (Eds.), *Handbook of the Psychology of Aging,* (6th ed., pp. 477–498). London, UK: Elsevier Academic Press.

Blackie, E. R., Colgan, J., McDonald, S., & McLean, K. C. (2020). A Qualitative Investigation into the Cultural Master Narrative for

Overcoming Trauma and Adversity in the United Kingdom. *Qualitative Psychology, 10*(1), 154–170. https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000163

Blank, A. A., Harries, P., & Reynolds, F. (2015). 'Without occupation you don't exist': Occupational engagement and mental illness, *Journal of Occupational Science, 22*(2), 197–209. https://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2014.882250

Booker, J. A., Fivush, R., & Graci, M. E. (2021). Narrative identity informs psychological adjustment: Considering three themes captured across five time points and two event valences. *Journal of Personality, 90*(3), 324–342. https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12668

Bourne, E. (1978). The state of research on ego identity: A review and appraisal. Part II. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 7*(4), 371–392. https://doi.org/10.1007/bf01537806

Boyatzis, R. E., (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis – a practical guide*. London, UK: Sage Publications Ltd.

Broady, D., & Börjesson, M. (2008). En social karta över gymnasieskolan [A social map over upper secondary school], In U. P. Lundgren (Ed.), *Individ - samhälle - lärande. Åtta exempel på utbildningsvetenskaplig forskning* (pp. 24–35). Vetenskapsrådets rapportserie 2008:2.

Broberg, A. (1989). *Child care and early development* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

Camia, C., & Habermas, T. (2020). Explaining change in content of life narratives over time. *Memory*, *28*(5), 655–668. https://doi.org/10.1080/09658211.2020.1761397

Confederation of Swedish Enterprise. (Svenskt Näringsliv, 2018). *En analys av ungdomars etablering på arbetsmarknaden*. [An analysis of youth establishment on the labor market]. https://www.svensktnaringsliv.se/bilder_och_dokument/2tzfk3_rapport_ungdomars_etablering_pa_arbetsmarknaden_webbpdf_1003930.html/BINARY/Rapport_Ungdomars_etablering_pa_arbetsmarknaden_webb.pdf

Conway, M. A., (2005). Memory and the self. *Journal of Memory and Language, 53*, 594–628. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jml.2005.08.005

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2017). *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*. (3rd ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE Publications Inc.

Crocetti, E., Scrignaro, M., Sica, L. S., & Magrin, M. E. (2012). Correlates of identity configurations: Three studies with adolescent and emerging adult cohorts. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 41*(6), 732–748. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-011-9702-2

Currin, J. M., Hubach, R. D., Meyers, H. J., DeBoy, K., Giano, Z., & Wheeler, D. L. (2020). Navigating disclosure of sexual minority identity for men in socio-politically conservative areas, *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health, 24*(1), 77–93. https://doi.org/10.1080/19359705.2019.1655511

Danielsson, T. (1984). Sagan om Karl-Bertil Jonssons julafton. [The fairy tale of Karl-Bertil Jonsson's Christmas Eve]. In T. Danielsson *Tage Danielssons paket* (pp. 207–216). Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand.

Davey, K. M., & Arnold, J. (2000). A multi-method study of accounts of personal change by graduates starting work: Self-ratings,

categories and women's discourses. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 73*(4), 461–486. https://doi.org/10.1348/096317900167164

Dresch, J., & Lovén, A. (2010). Vägen efter grundskolan [The path beyond compulsorary school]. In L. Lundahl (ed.), *Att bana väg mot framtiden: karriärval och vägledning i individuellt och politiskt perspektiv* (pp. 37–59). Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Dunlop, W. L., Walker, L. J., & Wiens, T. K. (2014). The nature of professional and relational self-aspects at the goal and narrative levels of personality. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 53, 595–604. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12072

Dyrdal, G. M., Røysamb, E., Nes, R. B., & Vittersø, J. (2011). Can a happy relationship predict a happy life? A population-based study of maternal well-being during the life transition of pregnancy, infancy, and toddlerhood. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 12*(6), 947–962. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-010-9238-2

Eich, E., Macaulay, D., & Ryan, L. (1994). Mood Dependent Memory for Events of the Personal Past. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 123*(2), 201–215. https://doi.org/10.1037//0096-3445.123.2.201

Erikson, E. H. (1950). *Childhood and Society*. London, UK: Norton.

Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York: Norton

Erikson, E. H. (1980). *Identity and the life cycle*. New York: Norton.

Erikson, E. H., Erikson, J. M., & Kivnick, H. Q. (1986). *Vital involvement in old age*. New York: Norton.

Eriksson, P. L., McLean, K. C., & Frisén, A. (2020a). Ta Det Onda Med Det Goda (Accepting the Bad that Comes with the Good) – A Cultural Framework for Identity Narratives of Difficult Experiences in Sweden. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, *20*(3), 157–169. https://doi.org/10.1080/15283488.2020.1781636

Eriksson, P. L., Wängqvist, M., Carlsson, J., & Frisén, A. (2020b). Identity Development in Early Adulthood. *Developmental Psychology*, 56 (10), 1968–1983. https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0001093

Ethical Review Act of 2003, 460 Swedish Law §§1-41. Available from http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svenskforfattningssamling/lag-2003460-om-etikprovning-av-forskningsom_sfs-2003-460

Eurofound. (2019). *Household composition and well-being*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/publications/2019/household-composition-and-well-being

Eurostat. (2021). *Mean age at first marriage by sex.* [Statistical database]. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00014/default/table?lang=en

Evans, R. I. (1964). *Dialogue with Erik Erikson*. Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Fadjukoff, P., Pulkkinen, L., & Kokko, K. (2005). Identity processes in adulthood: Diverging domains. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, *5*, 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532706xid0501_1

Feeney, B. C. (2007). The dependency paradox in close relationships: Accepting dependence promotes independence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92*(2), 268–285. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.92.2.268

Fivush, R., Habermas, T., & Reese, E. (2019). Retelling lives: Narrative style and stability of highly emotional events over time. *Qualitative Psychology*, *6*(2), 156–166. https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000150

Fraley, R. C., & Davis, K. E. (1997). Attachment formation and transfer in young adults' close friendships and romantic relationships. *Personal Relationships, 4*, 131–144. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6811.1997.tb00135.x

Frisén, A., Carlsson, J., & Wängqvist, M. (2014). “Doesn’t Everyone Want That? It’s Just a Given” Swedish Emerging Adults’ Expectations on Future Parenthood and Work/Family Priorities. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *29*(1), 67–88. https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558413502537

Galliher, R. V., McLean, K. C., & Syed, M. (2017). An integrated developmental model for studying identity content in context. *Developmental Psychology*, *53*(11), 2011–2022. https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000299

Giddens, A. (1992). *The Transformation of Intimacy*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Girme, Y. U., Overall, N. C., & Hammond, M. D. (2019). Facilitating autonomy in interdependent relationships: Invisible support facilitates highly avoidant individuals’ autonomy. *Journal of Family Psychology, 33*(2). 154–165. https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000488

Grotevant, H. D., Thorbecke, W., & Meyer, M. L. (1982). An extension of Marcia’s identity status interview into the interpersonal domain. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 11*(1), 33–47. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01537815

Gruffman, U. (2010). Klassresenärer och kvarstannare [Class travelers and remainers]. In L. Lundahl (Ed.). *Att bana väg mot*

framtiden: karriärval och vägledning i individuellt och politiskt perspektiv (pp. 63–90). Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Gyberg, F., Frisén, A., & Syed, M. (2019). "Being stuck between two worlds": Identity configurations of occupational and family identities. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research, 19*(4), 330–446. https://doi.org/10.1080/15283488.2019.1681997

Habermas, T., & Köber, C. (2015). Autobiographical reasoning is constitutive for narrative identity: The role of the life story for personal continuity. In K. C. McLean & M. Syed (Eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of Identity Development* (pp. 149–165). Oxford University Press.

Hazan, C., & Zeifman, D. (1994). Attachment processes in adulthood. In K. Bartholomew & D. Perlman (Eds.). *Advances in personal relationships,* (Vol. 5., pp. 151–178). London, UK: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Hoare, C. H. (2002). *Erikson on Development in Adulthood*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hoare, C. (2011). Work as the catalyst of reciprocal adult development and learning: Identity and personality. In C. Hoare (Ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Reciprocal Adult Development and Learning* (pp. 396–424). Oxford University Press.

Hyresgästföreningen. (2019). *Unga vuxnas boende i Sverige 2019*. [Early adults' accommodations in Sweden 2019]. https://www.hyresgastforeningen.se/globalassets/faktabanken/rapporter/unga-vuxna/unga-vuxna-2019/unga-vuxnas-boende-2019---sverige.pdf

Illouz, E. (2012). *Why love hurts: a sociological explanation*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Johansen, J. D., & Varvin, S. (2020). Negotiating identity at the intersection of family legacy and present time life conditions: A qualitative exploration of central issues connected to identity and belonging in the lives of children of refugees. *Journal of Adolescence, 80*, 1–9. https://doi/10.1016/j.adolescence.2020.01.016

Johnson, A.K., Odjakjian, K., & Park, Y. (2022). I am whatever I say I am: The salient identity content of U.S. adolescents. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 32*(2), 737–755. https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12721

Josselson, R. (2009). The present of the past: Dialogues with memory over time. *Journal of Personality*, *77*(3), 647–668. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2009.00560.x

Karnieli-Miller, O., Strier, R., & Pessach, L. (2009). Power relations in qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research, 19*(2), 279–289. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732308329306

Kiernan, K. (2004). Unmarried Cohabitation and Parenthood in Britain and Europe. *Law & Policy*, *26*(1), 33–55. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0265-8240.2004.00162.x

Köber, C., & Habermas, T. (2017). How Stable Is the Personal Past? Stability of Most Important Autobiographical Memories and Life Narratives Across Eight Years in a Life Span Sample. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *113*(4), 608–626. https://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000145

Korhonen, M., Komulainen, K., & Okkonen, V. (2020). Burnout as an identity rupture in the life course: A longitudinal narrative method. *Sociology of Health & Illness, 42*(8), 1918–1933. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.13183

Kroger, J. (2007). *Identity development: Adolescence through adulthood* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kroger, J. (2015). Identity development through adulthood: The move toward "wholeness". In K. C. McLean & M. Syed (Eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of Identity Development,* (pp. 65–80). Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199936564.013.004

Kroger, J., Martinussen, M., & Marcia, J. E. (2010). Identity status change during adolescence and young adulthood: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Adolescence*, *33*(5), 683–698. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2009.11.002

Labov, W., & Waletzky, J. (1967). Narrative analysis: Oral versions of personal experience. In J. Helm (Ed.). *Essays on the verbal and visual arts* (pp. 12–44). Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.

Lamb, M. E., Hwang, C. P., Bookstein, F. L., Broberg, A., Hult, G., & Frodi, M. (1988). Determinants of social competence in Swedish preschoolers. *Developmental Psychology, 24,* 58–70. http://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.24.1.58

Langemar, P. (2008). *Kvalitativ forskningsmetod i psykologi*. Stockholm: Liber.

Larsson, H., Eriksson, P. L., & Frisén, A. (2020). "It's a new chapter now": Establishing commitments in the romantic domain during young adulthood. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research, 20*(1), 37–57. https://doi.org/10.1080/15283488.2019.1704759

Le, Y., McDaniel, B. T., Leavitt, C. E., & Feinberg, M E. (2016). Longitudinal Associations Between Relationship Quality and Coparenting Across the Transition to Parenthood: A Dyadic

Perspective. *Journal of Family Psychology, 30*(8), 918–926. https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000217

Levinson, D. J. (1986). A conception of adult development. *American Psychologist, 41*(1), 3–13. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.41.1.3

Linn, J. G., & McGranahan, D. A. (1980). Personal Disruptions, Social Integration, Subjective Well-Being, and Predisposition Toward the Use of Counseling Services. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 8*(1), 87–100. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00892284

Lundahl, L. (2010). *Att bana väg mot framtiden: karriärval och vägledning i individuellt och politiskt perspektiv* [Paving the way to the future: career choice and guidance in an individual and policy perspective]. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Mantai, L. (2019). "Feeling more academic now": Doctoral stories of becoming an academic. *The Australian Educational Researcher, 46*, 137–153. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-018-0283-x

Marcia, J. E. (1966). Development and Validation of Ego-Identity Status. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 3*(5), 551–558. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0023281

Marcia, J. E., Waterman, A. S., Matteson, D. R., Archer, S. L., & Orlofsky, J. L. (1993). *Ego identity: A handbook for psychosocial research*. New York, NY: Springer New York.

Markus, H., & Nurius, P. (1986). Possible selves. *American Psychologist*, *41*, 954–969. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.41.9.954

McAdams, D. P. (1993). *The stories we live by: Personal myths and the making of the self*. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc.

McAdams, D. P. (2001). The psychology of life stories. *Review of General Psychology*, 5, 100–122. https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.5.2.100

McAdams, D. P. (2006). *The redemptive self: Stories Americans live by*. New York: Oxford University Press.

McAdams, D. P. (2011). Narrative identity. In S. J. Schwartz, K. Luyckx, & V. L. Vignoles (Eds.). *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research* (Vol. 1., pp. 99–115). New York, NY: Springer.

McAdams, D. P. (2013). The psychological self as actor, agent, and author. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 8, 272–295. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691612464657

McAdams, D. P. (2018). Narrative Identity: What Is It? What Does It Do? How Do You Measure It?. *Imagination, Cognition and*

Personality, *37*(3), 359–372. https://doi.org/10.1177/0276236618756704

McAdams, D. P. (2019). Continuity and growth in the life story – or is it stagnation and flux? *Qualitative Psychology*, *6*(2), 206–214. http://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000151

McAdams, D. P., & McLean, K. C. (2013). Narrative identity. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *22*(3), 233–238. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721413475622

McAdams, D. P., Bauer, J. J., Sakaeda, A. R., Anyidoho, N. A., Machado, M. A., Magrino-Failla, K., White, K. W., & Pals, J. L. (2006). Continuity and Change in the Life Story: A Longitudinal Study of Autobiographical Memories in Emerging Adulthood. *Journal of Personality*, *74*(5), 1371–1400. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2006.00412.x

McCoy, T. P., & Dunlop, W. L., (2016). Contextualizing narrative identity: A consideration of assessment settings. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 65, 16–21. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2016.08.006

McLean, K. C. (2017). And the story evolves: The development of personal narratives and narrative identity. In J. Specht (Ed.). *Personality development across the lifespan* (pp. 325–338). San Diego, CA: Elsevier Academic Press.

McLean, K. C., Dunlap, D., Jennings, S. C., Litvitskiy, N., & Pals Lilgendahl, J. (2021). Stability and Change in Autobiographical Reasoning: A Four-Year Longitudinal Study of Narrative Identity Development. *Journal of Personality, 90*(3), 343–356. https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12669

McLean, K. C., & Fournier, M. A. (2008). The content and processes of autobiographical reasoning in narrative identity. *Journal of Research in Personality, 42*, 527–545. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2007.08.003

McLean, K. C., Köber, C., & Haraldsson, K. G. (2019). The repeated narration of specific events and identity stability in midlife. *Qualitative Psychology*, 6(2), 146–155. https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000154

McLean, K. C., Koepf, I. M., Lilgendahl, J. P. (2022). Identity development and major choice among underrepresented students interested in STEM majors: A longitudinal qualitative analysis. *Emerging adulthood, 10*(2), 386–401. https://doi.org/10.1177/21676968211015549

McLean, K. C., Syed, M., Yoder, A., & Greenhhot, A. F. (2016). The role of domain content in understanding identity development processes. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 26*(1), 60–75. https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12169

Mehta, C. M., Arnett, J. J., Palmer, C. G., & Nelson, L. J. (2020). Established adulthood: A new conception of ages 30 to 45. *American Psychologist*, *75*(4), 431–444. https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000600

Mikulincer, M., Shaver, P.R., Bar-On, N., & Ein-Dor, T. (2010). The pushes and pulls of close relationships: Attachment insecurities and relational ambivalence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 98*, 450–468. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017366

Mitchell, L. L., Adler, J. M., Carlsson, J., Eriksson, P. L., & Syed, M. (2021). A conceptual review of identity integration across adulthood. *Developmental Psychology, 57*(11), 1981–1990. https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0001246

Mitchell, L. L., Kathawalla, U-M., Ajayi, A. A., Fish, J., Nelson, S. C., Peissig, L. H. M., & Syed, M. (2018). Ethnic-racial typicality and its relation to ethnic identity and psychological functioning. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 24*(3), 400–413. https://doi.org/10.1037/cdp0000193

Monteoliva, A., García–Martínez, J. M. A., & Calvo–Salguero, A. (2016). Perceived benefits and costs of romantic relationships for young people: Differences by adult attachment style. *The Journal of Psychology, 150*(8), 931–948. http://doi.org/10.1080/00223980.2016.1217190

Parada, F., & Salmena-Aro, K. (2022). Real-time processes of career goal construction: A case study approach with implications for the development of adolescents' identity. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research, 22*(1) 82–100. https://doi.org/10.1080/15283488.2022.2030233

Patterson, A. L., Dunlap, D., Payne, N. J., Peterson, A., Tiemersma, K., Turner, K., Wolin, H., Lilgendahl, J. P., & McLean, K. C. (2022). The role of repeated narration in identity development: The evaluation of the transition to college over time. *Qualitative Psychology, 9*(2), 171–193. https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000234

Peters, I., Kemper, N. F., Schmiedek, F., & Habermas, T. (2023). Individual differences in revising the life story − Personality and event characteristics influence change in the autobiographical meaning of life events. *Journal of Personality, 9*1(5), 1207–1222. https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12793

Pettersson, G., & Osvaldsson Cromdal, K. (2020). Narrativ analys. [Narrative Analysis] In M. Dahlstedt & S. Gruber (Eds.). *Metoder för forskning i social arbete*. (pp. 143–156). Malmö: Gleerups Utbildning AB.

Prebble, S. C., Addis, DR., & Tippett, L. J. (2013). Autobiographical memory and sense of self. *Psychological Bulletin, 139*(4), 815–840. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0030146

Ren, D., Arriaga, X.B., & Mahan, E. R. (2017). Attachment insecurity and perceived importance of relational features. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 34*, 446–466. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407516640604

Riessman, C. K. (2005). Narrative Analysis. In N. Kelly, C. Horrocks, K. Milnes, & B. Roberts, David Robinson (Eds.). *Narrative, Memory & Everyday Life* (pp. 17–23)., Huddersfield, UK: University of Huddersfield. http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/4920/

Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.

Rogers, L. O., Rosario, R. J., Padilla, D., & Foo, C. (2021). "[I]t's hard because it's the cops that are killing us for stupid stuff": Racial identity in the sociopolitical context of Black Lives Matter. *Developmental Psychology, 57*(1), 87–101. https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0001130

Schwartz, S. J., Zamboanga, B. L., Luyckx, K., Meca, A., & Ritchie, R. A. (2013). Identity in emerging adulthood: Reviewing the

field and looking forward. *Emerging Adulthood, 1*(2), 96–113. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696813479781

Schytt, E., Nilsen, A. B. V., & Bernhardt, E. (2014). Still childless at the age of 28 to 40 years: A cross-sectional study of Swedish women's and men's reproductive intentions. *Sexual & Reproductive Healthcare*, *5*(1), 23–29. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.srhc.2013.11.001

Shulman, S., & Connolly, J. (2014). The challenge of romantic relationships in emerging adulthood. In J. J. Arnett (Ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Emerging Adulthood (230–244)*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199795574.013.007

Simosi, M., Daskalaki, M., & Rousseau, D. M. (2022). What's next? Career narratives of women university graduates in times of precarity. *European Management Review, 19*, 222–235. https://doi.org/10.1111/emre.12482

Singer, J. A. (2019). Repetition is the scent of the hunt: A clinician's application of narrative identity to a longitudinal life study. *Qualitative Psychology, 6*(2), 194–205. http://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000149

Skolverket [Swedish National Agency for Education]. (2022). *Gymnasieprogrammen* [Upper secondary school programs].

https://www.skolverket.se/undervisning/gymnasieskolan/laroplan-program-och-amnen-i-gymnasieskolan/gymnasieprogrammen

Skorikov, V., & Vondracek, F. W. (1998). Vocational identity development: Its relationship to other identity domains and to overall identity development. *Journal of Career Assessment*, *6*(1), 13–35. https://doi.org/10.1177/106907279800600102

Skorikov, V. B., & Vondracek, F. W. (2011). Occupational identity. In S. J. Schwartz, K. Luyckx, & V. L. Vignoles (Eds.). *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research* (pp. 693–714). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-7988-9_29

Spörrle, M., Kruse, J., Gschwendtner, C., & Wieland, I. (2010). Wenn der Partner nicht die erste Wahl ist: Zum Zusammenhang zwischen soziometrischer Wahl im Rahmen elterlicher Betreuungsaufgaben und Partnerschaftszufriedenheit. [When the partner is not the first choice: On the connection between sociometric choice in the context of parental care tasks and partnership satisfaction]. *Zeitschrift für Psychodrama und Sociometries, 9*, 49–62. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11620-010-0066-5

Statistics Sweden. (SCB, 2018). *Number of people based on type of household, position in household, age and gender. Years 2011-2018*. [Statistical database]. http://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/sq/70524

Statistics Sweden. (SCB, 2019). *Arbetsmarknadssituationen för hela befolkningen 15-74 år, AKU 2018*. [Labour force surveys: 2018]. https://www.scb.se/contentassets/781c2ff72a694e3aa20c2b4b3c397ea7/am0401_2018a01_sm_am12sm1901.pdf

Statistics Sweden. (SCB, 2020a). *Föräldrars ålder i Sverige*. [Parental age in Sweden]. https://scb.se/hitta-statistik/sverige-i-siffror/manniskorna-i-sverige/foraldrars-alder-i-sverige/

Statistics Sweden. (SCB, 2020b). *Arbetslöshet i Sverige*. [Unemployment in Sweden]. https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/sverige-i-siffror/samhallets-ekonomi/arbetsloshet-i-sverige/

Statistics Sweden. (SCB, 2020c). *Ungdomsarbetslöshet i Sverige*. [Youth unemployment in Sweden]. https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/sverige-i-siffror/samhallets-ekonomi/ungdomsarbetsloshet-i-sverige/

Statistics Sweden. (SCB, 2021). Utbildningsnivån i Sverige [Education level in Sweden]. https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/sverige-i-siffror/utbildning-jobb-och-pengar/utbildningsnivan-i-sverige/

Strandell, J. (2018). Increasing marriage rates despite high individualization: Understanding the role of internal reference in Swedish marriage discourse. *Cultural Sociology*, *12*(1), 75–95. https://doi.org/10.1177/1749975517722476

Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (Mucf, 2020). *Inskrivna arbetslösa.* [Registered unemployed]. https://www.ungidag.se/indikator/arbete_och_boende/inskrivna-arbetsloesa

Swedish Board of Student Finance (Centrala Studiestödsnämnden, 2022). Statistik över studiestödsnyttjandet 2021. [Statistics on the use of student grants 2021]. https://www.csn.se/om-csn/statistik-och-rapporter/rapporter/2022-08-18-statistik-over-studiestodsnyttjandet-2021.html

Swedish Public Employment Service (2018). *Perspektiv på arbetsmarknadsläget för personer med kort utbildning.* [Perspectives on the labor market situation for persons with short education].

https://mb.cision.com/Public/1326/2640007/8426b9f0797e92b3.pdf

Syed, M., & Azmitia, M. (2010). Narrative and ethnic identity exploration: A longitudinal account of emerging adults' ethnicity-related experiences. *Developmental Psychology*, *46*, 208–219. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017825

Syed, M., & McLean, K. C. (2015). The future of identity development research. In K. C. McLean & M. Syed (Eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of Identity Development* (pp. 562–574). https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199936564.013.011

Syed, M., & McLean, K. C. (2016). Understanding identity integration: Theoretical, methodological, and applied issues. *Journal of Adolescence, 47*, 109–118. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2015.09.005

Syed, M., & McLean, K.C. (2018). Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development. In E. Braaten (Ed.). *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Intellectual and Developmental Disorders* (pp. 578–581). https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483392271

Syed, M., & McLean, K. C. (2022). Who gets to live the good life? Master narratives, identity, and well-being within a marginalizing society. *Journal of Research in Personality, 100*, 1–7. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2022.104285

The Royal Family Channel (2022, February 24). *On This Day: Charles and Diana's Awkward Engagement Interview, 1981* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0__QzksN8w

Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative Quality: Eight "Big-Tent" Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *16*(10), 837–851. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410383121

United States Census Bureau (2021). *Historical Marital Status Tables*. https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/families/marital.html

Vaughan, K., & Roberts, J. (2007). Developing a 'productive' account of young people's transition perspectives, *Journal of Education and Work, 20*(2), 91–105. https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080701314621

Vosylis, R., Erentaite, R., & Crocetti, E. (2018). Global versus domain-specific identity processes: Which domains are more relevant for emerging adults?. *Emerging Adulthood, 6*(1), 32–41. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696817694698

Wängqvist, M., & Frisén, A. (2016). Swedish emerging adults' sense of identity and perceptions of adulthood. In In R. Žukauskienė (Ed.). *Emerging adulthood in a European context* (pp. 154–174). London, United Kingdom: Routledge.

Wängqvist, M., Carlsson, J., van der Lee, M., & Frisén, A. (2016). Identity development and romantic relationships in the late twenties. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, *16*(1), 24–44. https://doi.org/10.1080/15283488.2015.1121819

Waterman, A. S. (1993). Overview of the Identity Status Scoring Criteria. In J. E. Marcia, A. S. Waterman, D. R. Matteson, S. L. Archer, & J. L. Orlofsky (Eds.). Ego identity. *A handbook for psychosocial research* (pp. 156–176). New York, NY: Springer-Verlag.

Waterman, A. S., & Archer, S. L. (1993). Identity Status During the Adult Years: Scoring Criteria. In J. E. Marcia, A. S. Waterman, D. R. Matteson, S. L. Archer, & J. L. Orlofsky (Eds.). *Ego identity. A handbook for psychosocial research* (pp. 241–263). New York, NY: Springer-Verlag.

Wong, E. G., Galliher, R. V., Pradell, H., Roanhorse, T., & Huenemann, H. (2022). Everyday Positive Identity Experiences of Spiritual/Religious LGBTQ+ BIPOC. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research, 22*(1), 35–50. https://doi.org/10.1080/15283488.2021.1996364

World Values Survey. (2020). *Findings and insights*. https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp

Appendix

I. Järdmo, C., Eriksson, P. L., & Frisén, 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., & Frisén, 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., Frisén, 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

IV. Codebook for narratives and repeated narratives