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Emotions in music culture: the circulation of love

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Abstract

Human feeling or emotion is a growing area of interest for cultural theory, particularly as a site of cultural negotiations of symbolic and affective kinds (Ahmed, 2004; Berlant, 1997; Massumi, 2002). Rather than perceiving emotions as a 'thing' outside or determined by culture, seeing emotions as an important part of the cultural process opens up opportunities for studying their role in cultural practices. Drawing on Ahmed's theories of 'happiness', this article explores the emotions expressed and discussed by a group of 14 to 16 year old girls in Sweden when listening to, talking about, and producing, sad love songs. The article examines how these emotions take part in shaping the girl's gendered orientation toward some things and not others. Sad love songs by American and Swedish artists were popular with most of the girls taking part in a study of girls' music culture and they perceived these songs as 'good' and connected to a particular emotional range. Most often the emotions expressed in the songs were those of sadness and pain caused by lost, failed or never achieved love. These emotions were a source of joy among the girls. In particular, sharing and listening to specific songs was described as joyful. The emotional experiences that they associated with sad love songs oriented the girls toward ideas and subjects such as love and boys. A future and grown-up heterosexual femininity was imagined. Furthermore, the girls' emotional experiences and talk created gendered ideals about who they wanted to become in order to be happy.

Introduction

Sometimes when I listen to songs I see images, like pictures in front of me, and things that happen, and feelings (Billie).

Music can be described as entertainment, a means for constructing identity in aesthetic terms, an economic commodity or involving emotional practices. As Billie, a fourteen-year-old girl, states in the quotation above, people experience and feel all sorts of things when they listen to music. Emotions may be purposively invoked or expressed, come as a surprise, be good, bad or painful. Nevertheless, all listeners will at times experience emotions when listening to music. Music also portrays emotion: in lyrics, sounds and performance, and while the variation of emotions in music is immense, 'love' is the emotion that dominates mainstream popular musical lyrics.

In cultural theory emotion and affect have received an increasing amount of attention during the past two decades. Affect is defined as the actual movement, response or feeling in the body, and become emotion when it enters discourse (Massumi, 2002). However, the distinction between affect and emotion is not always clear. Emotions also contain bodily experiences, and it can be difficult to discuss affect without mentioning its position in discourse. In this article I use Ahmed's (2004; 2008; 2010) theoretical framework to analyse emotions in cultural practices. Ahmed uses the term 'emotion' and regards 'affect' as something that does not "stand apart" from emotions when she "considers the messiness of the experiential, the unfolding of bodies into worlds, and the drama of contingency, how we are touched by what comes near" (2008: 124). I use Ahmed's (2008; 2010) theoretical explorations of happiness as my starting point. Scholars have described the interest in emotion, affect and embodiment as a shift of focus in cultural studies, media studies and feminist studies (Koivunen, 2001: 7): a field different from the study of meaning, representation and discourse in cultural studies and critical theory (Clough, 2007). On the other hand many, if not all, of the studies of emotion and affect are investigating the meanings of feeling: what do emotions and affects do to people, culture and the social context, what political implications do they have? Thus, the interest in 'meaning' seems to be prevailing within the cultural research on affect and emotion.

This article, which is part of a larger study, analyses the use of music by teenage girls and their constructions of gender. The study addresses both their consumption and production of music through media. The empirical data were collected using ethnographic method, participant observation at school and at home, focus group interviews and individual interviews, as well

as a collection of musical material with 23 participating girls between 14 and 16 years of age (Werner, 2009a; Werner, 2009b). At the time of the study in 2005 and 2006, all the girls participating in the research were living in a medium-sized Swedish city and attending two schools located in the same part of town, although with differing social and ethnic backgrounds. Most of the music that they listened to and produced can be described as 'mainstream' pop, rock, hip-hop or R&B that dominated the charts in Sweden and were produced mostly by American and Swedish artists. With this said, music with a subcultural character was popular amongst some of the girls, who most often listened to genres like death metal, heavy metal and "underground" do-it-yourself hip-hop made by unsigned Swedish artists.

The questions posed in this article are: How were emotions involved in the use of music among the girls, and what importance did emotions have for the girls' constructions of gender, belonging and difference? Moreover, how did local and global music cultures interplay in the circulation of emotions and constructions of gender? Different kinds of emotion were common in the girls' uses of music: anger, hate, joy, love, disgust and sadness. The following analysis will use 'love' as a focal point and investigate how the idea of this emotion circulated in discussions, listening and constructions of gender. By focusing on love, love songs and 'boys', certain issues of gender and sexuality are made visible, often at the expense of others. By meaning that a certain type of music is also put at the centre of analysis: sad love songs. This was the type of music that the girls talked about when they discussed love and "good songs" suitable to listen to when feeling love. I will propose two arguments: 1) that the emotions experienced when listening to music are not trivial but part of creating people's cultural and social life; and 2) that the circulation of 'love' was accommodated by sad songs and took part in shaping gender and imaginable futures for the girls in this study.

Emotions and power in cultural studies

While the field of research on music and emotion is growing, most of the scholarly work in the field seems to be using the "transmission model" as a foundation. Researchers argue that music can create or express the emotions intended by the producers. These perspectives often originate in music psychology (Juslin & Sloboda, 2010). While this contribution is valuable for understanding the importance of emotions to music, cultural studies scholars writing about culture and emotion approach these questions from a different angle. Ahmed argues that emotions are not a private issue originating from within people (2004a: 25), nor are they created by outside influences entering people. She argues that emotions circulate and create the reality that we live in as well as the identifications that we may feel with certain subjects and objects. From this perspective, emotions do something with us, something more than just making us feel. This 'doing' is both discursive and affective.

To begin with, Ahmed (2004a) argues that emotions are used to produce a sense of who we are and who the other is to us. Emotions are also involved in shaping nationalism and ideas of identity. They align some things and persons to be 'with us' and be loved, while at other times they work to separate us from others, as people or things which are different and feared. In this sense emotions produce subjects and objects that align when subjects orient themselves towards objects. Secondly, Ahmed (2008) argues that the way in which certain emotions are described as valuable and employed in relation to certain objects in public discourse orients people towards these objects rather than to others. Such "happy objects" are not merely material things but qualities and ideas that are ascribed happiness because they have come to be understood as objects that cause pleasure over time. Thus they are linked to happiness by discursive association (Ahmed, 2010: 23). Happy objects are perceived as 'good' things in themselves. When people are associated with those objects, they may also be understood as good and happy people. Furthermore, Ahmed argues that places that are proximate to happy objects may be seen as happy and good simply by association (Ahmed, 2010: 25). This association is also employed for the opposite, the 'unhappy'. For example, Ahmed (2008) argues that multicultural communities are described as unhappy in contemporary Western discourse because of perceived differences and the conflicts that they entail. The 'unhappy' is in this chain of association seen as 'bad'. Happiness thus orients people towards certain ideas and objects and away from others. Ahmed's (2010: 6) main argument then, is that by finding happiness in certain places these places are generated as good and promoted as more valuable. The nature of these places is by no means accidental but rather a consequence of privilege and power.

Ahmed (2010) also explores unhappy objects and subjects: the ones that challenge happiness. One of these figures is the feminist who acts as a "kills joy" for others "simply by not finding the objects that promise happiness to be quite so promising" (Ahmed, 2010: 65). Being a killjoy is, according to Ahmed, to question the objects agreed upon to be good and happy and, in so doing, to highlight how happiness is sustained by erasing all conflict. A killjoy can reveal what the idea of happiness covers up, such as inequalities, sexism or racism, mainly due to the fact that happy objects are describing some histories, subjects and futures as the road to happiness. Ahmed's understanding of happiness and killjoys shows how emotions circulate in discourse, taking on meaning but also being 'felt' by actual persons. Not only does happiness do something to the individual, therefore; but also it shapes the cultural and social context, meaning that emotions shape both people and the world that they live in.

A similar line of reasoning, although from a somewhat different theoretical perspective, is advanced by Hochschild (1983/2003), who argues that being a good woman in the home or in the labour force often requires emotional work to be perceived as friendly and happy, and therefore good. This is an argument that can be made for all work in the service industry where the right emotion (or 'attitude') is central to success. In Hochschild's argument, emotions are both gendered and classed by how they are practised in the workforce, shaping both the individual persons and the social/cultural world in which they operate. The examples from both Ahmed and Hochschild relate processes of power to the circulation and practices of emotion. The work of emotions is not the same for all subjects as persons can be racialised, classed and gendered through the prism of emotions. How emotions are put into play therefore, does something different within different people's lives due to the fact that emotions intersect with power. Emotions are always in play in cultural consumption and production. They are both felt and discussed by persons as well as agents in creating alliances between certain things, persons and feelings. Therefore, the place of emotions in cultural consumption and production is important for analysing more than an individual type of engagement (Ahmed, 2004b). Emotions are important then, even though (or perhaps because) they are not always perceived as important.

Gender, love and popular culture

Within music cultures different values and characteristics are ascribed to different types of music and genres (Holt, 2007). This process that connects music to value constructs some music as better than other music. The 'system' of genre and value is not straightforward, so that even though the mainstream music that tops the charts is usually ascribed low cultural value music historically and regarded as 'un-cool', it may be revived as 'hip'. The idea that pop music is of lesser value can be traced back to the division (made by rock fans and critics) between serious rock and trivial pop (Keightley, 2001: 111). Most often the mainstream music geared towards a young (female) audience – where the performer's voice has emotional range and the theme is romantic love – is ascribed particularly low value. This gendered division is made by both audiences and performers, and seems to be reinforced by the music industry and perceptions that women or girls rarely perform serious rock.

Age plays a part in the valuing of popular music because the audience of young girls seems to be the most despised. In other words, the music produced for them has the lowest value, and in addition, it is also often about love. Genres of music were talked about in terms of gender among the girls taking part in my study, with hip-hop and rock being mainly described as masculine genres, and pop and R&B mainly described as feminine, so requiring prefixes like 'girls' rock' when talking about rock not performed by men. This gendering of music was explained by them as having to do with the sounds, styles and artists of the genres. Sad love songs could cut across the genre and gender of performers, but still be perceived as "girls' music" simply because they were about love.

Several feminist scholars within cultural studies have argued that representations of love in films, books and television have gendered audiences of girls and women who enjoy these texts in particular ways that shape ideas of gender. Gendering takes place when these mainly female audiences construct what it means to be a woman and how one feels (like a woman) when consuming cultural representations of love and relationships (Ang, 1985; Partington, 1991; Radway, 1991; Warhol, 2003). Portrayals of love in soap operas, films and romance novels may vary but all these stories seem to attract women and construct femininity as concerned with feelings and, particularly, with love.

Key here is that love is represented as the ultimate tool for female happiness. Gledhill (1997: 345) argues that genres are coded feminine when they attract a female audience and are identified as cultural forms concerned with feelings, identifying soap operas as one such genre. As this tends to be concerned with the private realm, emotions and fantasy, and so ascribed low value in the genre system (Gledhill, 1997: 349). While Gledhill is focused on an analysis of film and television, similar divisions can be found in the world of music. Bayton (1998: 12) has argued that singing itself is a gendered practice coded as feminine since women in the history of popular music are more commonly singers as opposed to those playing musical instruments.

Emotions are here seen as active agents in the cultural and social world by creating and orienting subjects, while different emotions also shape different identifications. In both Ahmed's work on 'happy' objects and Gledhill's on love in popular culture, emotions are revealed as constructors of identity, love, and femininity. Similarly, Jonasdottir argues that love is central in shaping gendered identity for women:

Woman needs to love and to be loved in order to be socio-existentially empowered, in order to be a person (1994: 224).

She argues that love is crucial for both the possibility of being perceived and perceiving oneself as a 'woman'. In order to take that position, Gledhill states that women must practise love. Likewise, Ahmed (2010) argues that girls and women are first and foremost educated to care for others' happiness by their love for them, with their parents' and husband's happiness as the vehicle for a "good woman's" happiness. In other words, a good woman is not happy on her own merits, but rather because she loves others. Girls' cultural practices around sad love songs are investigated in these terms.

Sad songs about love

The girls participating in my study described "sad songs" or "slow love songs" as popular to listen to and a topic of much discussion.¹ The songs originated from different genres such as pop, rock, R&B and hip-hop, but a common feature of all of them was their slow rhythms, lyrics about love, and the emotional nature of performances by the artists. This music is usually accompanied by videos and images that express both love and love lost (or sadness). When Julia and Sussie talked about sad love songs in a focus group interview, they said:

I like songs that are about love, and sad love, because now, at our age it is all about that, in our lives too, about love (Julia).

When you are in love... (Sussie).

Yes, then there is a lot more fun, then it is much better to listen to songs like that [love songs]. You recognise the emotions, if you know what I mean (Julia).

Julia is only one of many girls in the study emphasising the importance of love as well as lyrics about love in music. She argues that love songs are listened to because, as teenagers, they can identify with the emotions. When the girls talked about music they underlined the importance of sad love songs by discussing them in relation to stories from their own life. Sussie and Majida playfully teased Julia by bringing up the boy she was in love with. In the conversation they discussed the song *You're Beautiful* (by James Blunt). The girls all agreed that it was a good song because of the lyrics about sad love, but Julia was particularly fond of it. Majida said that it was because Julia listened to the song constantly around Valentine's Day, because she was in love with a boy in their class and had sent him a rose hoping that he would notice her. However, the boy never knew

that the sender was Julia. She remembered that time and, even though she was not in love with him anymore (nine months later), the song still reminded her of him, of the love, the rose and how it never came to be.

This example highlights how sad love songs are associated with love in the girls' own life - agreeing that this type of song was "girls' music". In contrast, Fatma argued that, "guys' music is more like hardcore rap music." By associating sad love songs with girls, Fatma integrates the songs and their focus on love in how girls' develop their sense of personhood. Moreover, painful love is seen as a feminine emotion. In this way, sad songs are constructed as good and pleasurable to listen to, like a happy object (Ahmed, 2010), and as objects associated with teenage love and teenage girls.

Such sad songs about unfulfilled love with 'grieving' performers emerge in different shapes. For example, the R&B song, *So Sick* by Ne-Yo, differs significantly in aesthetic expression from James Blunt's song. This song portrays a relationship that has ended, while raising . topics about love lost and mistreatment in relationships.

Another type of sad love song liked by a few of the girls were Turkish or Lebanese ballads. Fatma's favourite singer was Ajda Pekkan:

It is the lyrics, when they sing slow songs. How they make me feel. And I understand them very well in Turkish when they sing, good lyrics (Fatma).

What is this song [we are listening to Ajda Pekkan's "Kimler geldi kimler gecti"] about? (Interviewer).

It is about, I am not so good at explaining the plot, this one is about love. She sings about a boy who hurt her like, she loves him (Fatma).

When asked about the attraction of these songs, they talked about their ability to affect them emotionally through words and lyrics. The feeling in the body when listening to these songs is also described as pleasurable, as some songs may invoke pain, but this is a type of joyful pain.

It should be noted that when talking about the sad song, Fatma was smiling. This was also evident in a number of the other respondents during the interview who talked about 'loving' and sharing love songs online. Warhol (2003: 30) argues that emotional reactions to culture can bring two separate emotions simultaneously, like crying and feeling happy while watching a movie. The positive feelings that the girls describe when listening to sad love songs can be understood as an entanglement of happy objects and love-pain. Ahmed (2008: 124) notes that, "an object becomes happy if it affects us in a good way", going on to note that to "be affected by an object in a good way is also to have an orientation towards an object as being good." There is no need for the object or all the emotions associated with it to be happy. In this way, one could argue that the songs about sad love, and the figure of love that was associated with the songs, oriented the girls toward love, even though the songs expressed sadness. Preoccupation with love and sad love songs is in this practice constructed as beneficial, feminine, and joyful *because* love is understood as an area of emotion where hurt lingers. At the same time, hurt can also be seen as a sign of real love.

This idea of hurt and depression was thus attractive to Julia, Fatma, Sussie and most of the other girls participating in the study. By contrast, Tess, who was in the same year of school and socialised with other friend groups, rejected the sad love songs that all her friends liked:

Tina loves this stuff [we are listening to a sad love song in Swedish] but I just think it is so depressing. Why would you want to listen to that? It is sad (Tess).

Tess questioned the sad love song's function for her friends and could not see why they were happy objects when they had 'depressing' lyrics. In this conversation she argued that the songs were not happy at all as she only heard grief and loss in them. When her best friend Tina talked about sad love songs during a later interview, she pointed out that "she [Tess] is not into boys, she lives outside town [on a farm] and she still only cares about horses". In this comment Tina suggested that Tess would come to care about boys and possibly like sad love songs in the future. Tina's comments on Tess suggested that an interest in sad love songs, love and boys is not only a girl's interest but also an interest for girls of a certain age, maturity, and urbanity.

This point reflects Baker's (2004) position that girls play with music, and that their gender performance in this play constructs boundaries between children and teenagers. The girls in Baker's study wanted to exclude younger girls from listening to sexy music (2004: 209). According to Baker (2004: 206) the upholding of boundaries between children (younger girls) and pre-teens (older girls) helped the older girls to play with their gender identity, arguing that music is an area for negotiation of how to grow up as a girl. The girls in my study were teenagers, a period where love, sexuality and boys were becoming things in which they were expected to have an interest. Not showing an interest, like Tess, suggested a younger identity or immaturity. Tess' position of not seeing the happiness in the sad love songs could also be understood as the position of a killjoy (Ahmed, 2010: 65). Tess pointed out the grief and hurt that the figure of love in the songs involved, and contested the idea that the sad love songs were joyful that all her friends shared. By doing so she questioned the very figure of the unhappy teenage girl for whom love is good or a road to 'good'. Tina neatly placed Tess back into childhood and explained away the threat of Tess, who was killing her joy and happiness in the figure of love. By making Tess the person in need of change, the person with the 'problem', Tina, preserved the happy object as happy.

Emotional performances

The sad love songs could be about emotions and bring on emotions, but they could also be listened to when the girls felt emotional as a sort of "mood music". The girls argued that sometimes emotions came from inside of them and travelled out:

Julia, for example, said that “teenage girls struggle with feelings of love”. The songs that they might choose were preferably ones where they could recognise their own pain in the voice of the singer, and could personally relate to their performance of emotion. Seeing emotions as both inside out and outside is significant Western culture according to Ahmed (2004b). The content of the songs and the performances of the artists were, therefore, important for the emotions travelled into, and out of the girl. Billie explains the process as follows:

You recognise it, feelings you yourself had and it is in her voice. She is really inside this emotion.

Billie argues that the singer’s ability to be convincing in an emotional sense was central to the quality of the song and how she felt about it. In this way, the cultural commodity of the song was important in the circulation of love. According to Billie, for the lyrical content and performance to affect her, an artist needed to be convincingly heartbroken in order for the sad love song to achieve emotional value. The girls themselves described this feeling in the music as evoking memories and fantasies, reminding the girls of boyfriends or boys that they were in love with, as well as friends or family far away.

The emotional listening that they talk about can be understood as a sort of training in romance and the range of emotions involved in interpersonal relationships. Hochschild (1983/2003) writes that emotions can be used as a form of capital – a person may be good at feeling and dealing with other people’s feelings. This emotional care for others was mostly discussed and practised by the girls in relation to a certain figure, the boy. This care was sometimes described as carried out in relation to actual boys, but most often discussed with girlfriends or imagined on one’s own. The practice of negotiating love and care can be seen as preparation for future emotional work, as training skills that young women are expected to have, and thus securing their gender identity as appropriately feminine (Jonasdottir, 1994; Ahmed, 2010).

Some of the girls wrote their own music with the themes and rhythms of their production often reflecting the sad love songs that they consumed. Natalie argued that she liked songs “with meaning in them ... about how young people feel and all that stuff, feelings.” One day, when I met her for an interview at school, she talked about a new song that she had written for acoustic guitar:

It is slow, my new song. It has speed when I play some parts on the guitar but I sing slow and it is about sad stuff. About a family where the dad beats the mum, and the daughter, it is not true or anything (Natalie).

The genre of the song that Natalie sang a part of to me is difficult to define, as it could be rock or soul. This being said, it is a ballad about feelings: feelings of love and hate between the three members of a family. Natalie showed embarrassment and did not want to play me the whole song, even though I asked her twice as we continued to talk about her sources of inspiration. She claimed that she did not think of any artist in particular, but rather about the feelings, like love and despair, that teenagers struggle with when growing up. Natalie also insisted that she had never been in any situation where she had been hurt by a lover or her father – something that was important for her to emphasise to me. Natalie had obviously given the topic of love and domestic violence enough thought to put her own production together with her guitar and lyrics in constructing her interpretation of a sad love song. Like Julia, Natalie described feeling for the music *and* negotiating ideas about relationships and the emotions that these relationships could bring as important. Sometimes, the relationships that the girls discussed were real, and I had actually met the boys that they were in love with, while at other times, like for Natalie, they were talked about as imagined possibilities

In this manner, ideas about love circulated in the girls’ musical practices as consumers and producers. Not only did Natalie find love and relationships interesting enough to write her own songs about, she also chose to focus on the risks involved in loving. The partner/father in her story was a possibility for women/girls and, even though Natalie described him as being in the wrong, she was aware that violence could also happen in romantic relationships.

Billie also wrote her own music and had a crush on a boy who played, sang and wrote his own music. He was an inspiration to her and she talked about how listening to his music made her feel happy, despite the fact that the song that she loved the most by him was a sad love song:

It [the song] is, he sings about a girl that left him, and he sings “even though you left me I will always have you with me here in my heart” and that kind of stuff, “go if you want to”, he sings. It’s in Persian (Billie).

Billie said that she felt happy because the song, which she had on her MP3-player and played to me, reminded her of him and the place where he lived. Even though she said they were not together (and maybe never would be) these emotions were described as pleasurable for her to revisit while listening to his song. Billie did not understand Persian, but her interpretation of the theme of the song, which was once translated to her, was that it was about a love lost. The feelings that she related to the song were love and a sad sort of happiness. The song also functioned as an inspiration for her music production, talking about how she wanted to play the guitar as well as the boy, and that she wrote sad songs similar to his but in Swedish. The emotions that she said she experienced while listening to and writing songs like these had a dimension of melancholia, a form of sadness where loss is experienced. The girls talked about longing for love when orienting themselves towards sad love songs and ideas about boys. Love seemed to be inherently sad, in lack of something. Melancholia is, similarly, often described as something occurring in relation to that which has been lost (Butler, 1995). Natalie and Billie enjoyed discussing the kind of melancholia that referred to romantic loss. By doing so, they also oriented themselves toward possible futures, emotions that they may feel, and subjects that they may feel them in relation to – mainly boys and men.

Boys, authenticity and the local

Another popular genre of music at the girls’ schools was rap in Swedish that was mostly performed by unsigned young artists. The music is part of the global culture of hip-hop that uses the same beats and samples as famous American hip-hop-artists.

This music was referred to as '*svennerap*'. *Svenne* is slang for Swedish – a word with similar connotations as 'Aussie' for Australians. This music was produced mainly by young men of various ethnic backgrounds living in Sweden, performed in Swedish and distributed free online from the '*frizon*' site (or free zone in English). ² Downloading music from this site was legal and approved by the artists who upload their songs. Many of the artists are teenagers themselves and much of the music has low production values. Many of the songs popular on *frizon* were sad songs about love. Isabella describes the genre thus:

These songs that I like [from *frizon*, she is pointing at the MP3 player's screen] are about love and emotions. How happy you are and how sad you are, how you have been heartbroken ... all that (Isabella).

Svennerap is a distinctly local genre where the artists are people that the girls could meet in real life, see perform live and meet in a social or even 'dating' context. Isabella knew some artists who uploaded music to *frizon* and argued that the strength of this music was that it described emotions that she could relate to and feel.

These artists rapped about topics often repeated within global hip-hop like 'the hood', crime, social outsiders and love, and displayed similarities to these artists in terms of style of clothes and types of tough masculinity (Mitchell, 2001). *Svennerap* has a proclivity towards slow songs that were rapped as well as with a chorus on themes of love and loss. Importantly, many songs of this genre that are available on *frizon* prove more popular than the songs focused towards "gangster life". A song by the artists Anton and Affe was claimed by the girls to be about losing a loved one, with the implication that life is essentially over after such misfortune. These very dramatic statements were not uncommon within the genre that seemed to take lost love and depression to its extreme with songs called "Förlåt mig" (Forgive me), "Vilsna flicka" (Lost girl), "Jag blöder kärlek" (I'm bleeding love), "Du var mina andetag" (You were my breaths) and many similar titles. ³

Svennerap was often described as the most emotional type of listening as it was concerned with love while being tied up with the girls' familiar *milieu*. Songs in *svennerap* often described lost love or disasters in medium-sized Swedish towns, at youth centres, or in the schoolyard. Furthermore, the artists were almost as young as the girls, using the same slang words, describing contexts and places that the girls knew about, while as the music is performed in their native Swedish, any subtle messages could be picked up. The girls described the songs and artists as relating to their own lives, as these artists were not rich celebrities in America. The unprofessional production of the music was another reason that it was considered 'real', expressing true emotions.

The artists in *svennerap* were not only performing emotions that the girls themselves said that they felt – they were also the objects of emotions for some of the girls. Some saw these boys as potential boyfriends and as objects of desire, with two of the girls in relationships with boys who recorded *svennerap* at the time of the study. Thus, the function of love in their listening was both something that the girls oriented themselves towards while also discussing feeling love for the producers of *svennerap*. This was another effect of the local nature of the music – not only did the circulation of love take part in shaping the personhood of the girls, but also their actual social lives. The boys in the genre modeled themselves after a tough hip-hop masculinity, spending a lot of time in male-dominated groups in public spaces, bragging about groupies and being a little 'dangerous'. When the girls discussed these boys the danger seemed to be an attractive trait, as they themselves had none of these traits, but wanted to have a serious monogamous relationship with a boy. These ideas about femininity and masculinity, where the man is the one active in public space bragging about sexual conquest while the woman occupies the opposing role of being faithful at home, seems like a fairly traditional construction of heterosexual gender relations. These ideas were important in the discussions of love. When the girls engaged in both imagined and actual love and relationships, they were playing out their future, and they did so in these heterosexual and gender-divided terms, with the boyfriend taking a more active position as an artist and a man, and the girl left with less agency, and often as simply the admirer of the artist.

Family now and in the future

While my focus has been on the girls' circulation of love and emotional listening, I am conscious of the fact that this was not the only topic in discussions about the sad love songs. Betrayal of loyalty between friends and relations to parents and siblings were also emotionally important themes for some girls. As in Natalie's song about domestic violence, these themes were also mirrored in the circulation of love. Roseneil (2004: 4111) claims that friendship has a growing significance in today's Western society, as the individualism of late modernity results in friends are for some groups filling the same functions as family once did, and it is impossible to uphold a definite distinction between the two. Within these teenage friendship groups "the best friend" has great importance, with their acceptance and affection being important in positive or negative feelings. Isabella described how the end of her best friend's loyalty towards her seriously damaged her life for a couple of months. She talked about turning to *svennerap* and other sad songs to help her reconcile and better express her emotions of loss, sadness and insecurity. Natasha, on the other hand, had a strong emotional connection with her brother and channeled her feelings by listening to the rap/guitar music that he and his friends produced. Their songs made her feel closer to her brother, and happy.

Despite these examples, the focus remained on boyfriends was very important, if not the most important, relationship focus in a young girl's life. Abandoning one's friend for a boy was therefore acceptable, even though it was painful for the friend. This idea about boys as the object of love, and as worthy of sacrifice, was also understood differently depending on gender. Boys were not required to give up their close friendships when they met a girl, as only girls needed to commit fully to a romantic relationship. The girls imagined their future as following a heterosexual narrative of romantic love and playing an emotionally nurturing role, which is not the same as saying that all of them will in reality meet a boy, start a family and do the emotional work in this family. Edelman (2004: 113) argues that family and children are central in images of the future in contemporary politics and culture or as an imaginary place to long for, calling this tendency to portray the future as a place for families and children "reproductive futurism", and claiming that the idea of reproduction as key to a brighter future underpins contemporary society. According to Edelman, any alternative to reproductive practice is seen as threatening, finding evidence in how men and women take up gendered positions in which the woman is seen as the primary caretaker of small children, meeting their

need for love and nurturing. Imagining a future with love, with a boy, can thus be understood as the first step toward a family as well as upholding a woman's place in this family – a gendered position where love skills are necessary.

Conclusion

For the girls that participated in my study, listening to music was a practice that involved strong emotions and was an emotional practice not to be trivialised. The emotion that was most often talked about was love. When listening to sad love songs they argued that the emotions of happiness and sadness, love and desire were simultaneously experienced. The orientation towards love included describing love as a happy and a good thing, even though the associated emotions could be painful. The emotions in their music use were seen as enjoyable, but also oriented the girls toward a happy future in the hopeful, future-oriented 'inertia' of love. Emotions and music linked the girls to their futures, and to the choices that they wanted to make in their lives.

These choices were primarily concerned with their relationships with others. This focus on others, and the importance of caring for other people, assisted them in the ongoing creation of their gender and sexuality. Meeting someone to fall in love with and to share a future with was a central image that was desirable in the emotional listening in terms of heterosexuality, family and living together. Their place in this future was gendered feminine in relation to a tougher masculinity. Even though close relationships with friends and family were important for love, they were of secondary importance to the idea of romantic heterosexuality. The girls oriented themselves towards boys and gendered positions in relationships through the circulation of love in music use. This practice contributed to shaping them as persons but also reconstructed their already familiar ideas of gendered positions in relation to love and the family. Even though the genre of *svennerap* was largely local, most of the music that they listened to, and the messages of love contained within this music, had a global audience. Therefore, whether and how such circulations of love in sad love songs might take similar shape in the music cultures of other teenage girls in other parts of the world, is a promising subject of research on music, gender, affect and emotion.

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1. Other types of music and songs from electronic dance music, hip-hop or death metal without love themes were included in the girls' collections. This article focuses on the emotion or feeling of love and how it circulates in and through the use of music. Sad songs about love were the main point of reference for the girls when talking about love and music and, therefore, the talk about and use of these songs are explored.

2. The web site (still operating as of September 2011) <http://www.frizon.se> calls itself the home of Swedish hip-hop. It started as a project for unsigned artistes in Borlänge (a Swedish town) in 2001 and has continued to grow since its establishment.

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